

Alba Pratalia



BOB

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By Alba Pratalia

The rain was fine and insistent, a silvery drizzle that made the cobblestones glisten like wet fish scales. Bob's boots made quiet splashes as he walked, slow and unbothered, shoulders hunched under a grey waterproof hood. His hands were buried deep in the folds of a coat that had seen too many seasons. The alley smelled of fish guts, cigarette butts, wet cardboard, and something indefinably sweet, like rot dressed up for church.

A door clanged open ahead with the rattling clatter of someone in a hurry. A young man in a stained apron stumbled out, lugging two black garbage bags that looked heavier than whatever promises the kitchen had made to the health inspector. He threw them toward a dented bin, missed, swore softly.

"Evening," Bob said, voice flat but not unfriendly.

The boy looked up, surprised, blinking under a mop of wet hair. “Hey.”

“Busy night?” Bob asked, stooping to pick up an empty wine bottle that had rolled near the wall. He gave it a lazy spin between his fingers, holding it by the neck like a poor man’s baton.

“Packed,” the boy said. “Rain makes people hungry, I guess.”

Bob nodded, letting the bottle swing in his hand. “Or just drives them inside. You toss out anything good?”

The boy laughed, not sure if it was a joke. “Not unless you like half-eaten lasagna and shrimp tails.”

Bob tilted the bottle toward a flickering lamp above the door, peering at the label like it held secrets. “Chianti. Terrible vintage. But it’s got a nice shape to it.” He tossed it up and caught it again, one-handed. The glass made a hollow clink against his palm.

The boy wiped his hands on his apron and leaned against the wall, watching. Bob was quiet for a moment, turning the bottle in slow arcs like a metronome thinking about something else.

“You work here long?” he asked without looking.

“Couple months.”

Bob nodded again. Rain kept falling, rhythmic and gentle. The bottle twirled.

Bob’s hand stopped twirling the bottle. For a breath, he looked at the boy—really looked at him—as if measuring the depth behind those wet, blinking eyes. Then, without a word, without a change in expression, he brought the bottle down hard against the corner of the dumpster. It shattered with a sharp crack, jagged glass blooming from the neck like a crown of teeth.

The boy didn’t even flinch at first. Just looked confused.

The first stab caught him high on the cheek, just beneath the eye. A wet, tearing sound. The second sank deeper, slicing across his nose, opening his face like meat. He tried to scream, but the third blow took care of his mouth—glass catching on teeth, gums, lips.

Bob's arm moved with grim rhythm now. No rage. No thrill. Just a steady, mechanical purpose. Stab. Stab. Stab. The boy slumped but didn't fall. Not yet. Not until Bob stepped in, placed a hand gently on the back of his head, and drove the broken bottle down into his throat.

A thick, bubbling noise replaced the rain. Then nothing but the sound of water on stone, and Bob's breath, calm and even.

Bob let the boy slide down the wall, crumpling in a heap among the slick trash bags. The broken bottle stayed where it was, jutting from the neck like a gravestone nobody would visit. Blood mingled with

rainwater, winding its way down the alley in lazy red threads.

He adjusted his hood. No hurry, no panic. Just the shuffle of boots on wet stone as he stepped around the body and back into motion. Hands in pockets again. The city, indifferent, continued humming.

At the next corner, neon spilled out from a crooked sign above a low door: *Tavernetta del Porto*. The kind of place where the beer was flat, the bartender half-asleep, and the music an insult to silence.

Bob pushed the door open. Warmth and damp cigarette smoke hit his face.

He walked in like any other man with nothing urgent to say.

The bar was dim and low-ceilinged, walls sweating with the breath of a dozen damp coats. A jukebox in the corner whispered something slow and out of

tune. Bob found a stool that didn't wobble too much and sat.

The bartender—a woman with a nose like a switchblade and the patience of a stone—didn't ask questions. Just looked once and nodded.

“Whisky. Tap beer,” Bob said.

She poured the whisky in a thick glass, slid it over, then drew the beer slow from the tap, letting the head settle like a sigh.

Bob took the pint, ice cold and sweating. Drank half of it in one long, slow pull. Let it settle in his gut. Then took the whisky, raised it slightly as if to toast some invisible thing across the room, and tossed it back.

It burned, but only faintly. The kind of fire you forget even while it's still burning.

He set the glass down, empty. Fingers traced the rim of the beer. Then he drank again, slower now, eyes

on the mirror behind the bottles. Watching the door.
Watching himself not look.

Three beers and three whiskies had settled in Bob's belly like tenants with nowhere better to be. The bar noise had dulled to a low thrum in his ears, voices and glasses and the cough of a jukebox coughing out a ballad from a dead decade.

Nature called—not politely, not insistently, just matter-of-fact. Bob stood up, walked slow and steady through the hazy warmth, past tables, past slouches, toward the cracked door with a hand-painted sign that read “Gentlemen” as a vague suggestion.

Inside, the light flickered like it had a grudge. The air was tiled in piss and bleach. Two men stood at the urinals—jackets unzipped, backs curved, eyes fixed on the yellow-stained wall. Neither turned.

Bob stepped up beside them.

Without a word, he reached out and took the nearest man's hand, holding it as if about to check his fortune. Then he snapped the pinky sideways with a clean, focused motion—like breaking a wishbone.

The man shrieked, his knees buckled, piss spraying the floor. Bob let go and turned to the other one, who was still processing the sound when Bob grabbed him by the back of the head and drove his skull into the porcelain. Once. Twice. A third time, just to be sure. Blood and ceramic mixed in a spiderweb crack around the flush button.

The first man was still wailing, trying to crawl, when Bob knelt beside him. Calmly, deliberately, he pressed both thumbs into the man's eye sockets. Met resistance. Pushed harder. Something gave. Something wet. The screams turned to gurgles.

Then, silence.

Bob stood, unzipped, relieved himself at the same urinal now slick with other fluids. Zipped back up.

Went to the sink, washed his hands, checked his reflection once, then walked back out into the bar.

The bartender didn't look up. He slid back onto his stool.

"Beer," he said. "And a whisky."

The bartender poured without a word. She didn't ask about the faint red smear on Bob's sleeve or why his knuckles were wet. She had the look of someone who had seen worse, or at least learned the cost of curiosity.

Bob took the beer first—no rush now—and drank from it like it was the only honest thing in the room. The whisky came next, a dark little pool in a thick-bottomed glass. He knocked it back, felt it coat his throat like varnish.

The jukebox changed tracks. Something mournful and full of brass.

He lit a cigarette, even though it was technically not allowed. No one objected. Smoke curled up into the dim rafters and joined all the other sins already hanging there.

Behind him, someone coughed.

To his right, a man with a shaved head and a snarl carved into his face looked over. “Rough night?” he asked, grinning with teeth that looked more borrowed than owned.

Bob didn’t answer. Just dragged on his cigarette, stared at the beer, then at the mirror behind the bar.

The man leaned in. “Hey, I’m talkin’ to you, raincoat.”

Bob took another sip. The beer was warm now, and tasted like blood.

The man tapped his shoulder.

Bob stood up. Not fast. Just... upward. The stool fell backward with a wooden clatter.

The room got quieter, as if it knew.

Bob turned, looked the man in the eyes.

Then he smiled. The kind of smile that never reaches the eyes.

The shaved-head man blinked. Confusion flickered across his face like static.

Bob didn't raise his fists. Didn't posture. He stepped forward with a slowness that was somehow more dangerous than speed. He brought his hands up—not in threat, but with a softness that made it worse. One hand cupped the side of the man's head, the other slid behind the neck, fingers splayed like he was holding something fragile. Intimate. Deliberate.

And then—without a word, without a grin, without warning—he pulled the man's face toward his own and kissed him.

Mouth to mouth. Full. Lingering. Wet. A kiss soaked in whiskey and smoke, open and insistent. Tongue and all.

The bar froze.

Even the jukebox stuttered.

The man didn't move. Not away. Not forward. Just stood there, paralyzed by the sheer force of confusion and spit.

Bob pulled back an inch, their lips still brushing.

"Now," he whispered, breath hot against the man's mouth, "let's never speak of this."

Then he patted his cheek twice, almost fondly, picked up his beer, and returned to his stool.

The jukebox resumed. No one said a thing.

The man stood there for a long second, slack-jawed and blinking, as if he'd just walked into the wrong

decade. His fists were still clenched, but the aggression had bled out of them, replaced by something raw and rattled. Maybe shame. Maybe curiosity. Maybe a memory he wasn't ready to have.

He turned without another word and disappeared through the front door into the wet night.

Bob sipped what remained of his beer, then held the empty glass between his fingers, watching the condensation run down like slow tears. He set it down with a soft clink and exhaled smoke through his nose.

The bartender finally spoke.

"You always kiss the ones you don't kill?"

Bob shrugged. "Only the pretty ones."

She didn't smile, but she poured him another drink.

Time drifted. A few regulars wandered out. Someone snored in a booth. The jukebox played a slow Elvis tune nobody had asked for, but nobody stopped.

Bob sipped his new beer. The night outside was still dripping down the window like time itself refusing to move on. Somewhere out in the dark, footsteps echoed—maybe the kiss had turned the man poetic, or just insane.

Bob didn't care. He'd done what he came for.

And he wasn't done yet.

The motel was a long strip of peeling paint and flickering lights, the kind of place that looked like it had given up trying to pretend it wasn't a crime scene waiting to happen. Bob's key clicked in the lock of Room 7, and he stepped inside. The air smelled of old carpet, bleach, and a memory of someone else's bad night.

Double bed. Lumpy, but wide. He liked to roll.

He sat on the edge, stared at the floor. Not drunk enough. Not even tired. The night hummed behind the window like a broken promise. Sleep wouldn't come. Not like this.

So he stood, dressed again, zipped the coat up to the throat. The hallway was quiet, except for a distant TV muttering nonsense through a wall.

He tried the first door: locked.

Second: same.

Third—Room 10—gave a soft creak and swung inward.

No alarm. No voices. Just a quiet couple breathing the thick, heavy air of cheap sleep.

He stepped inside like a shadow. The man was on his back. The woman curled against him. Bob leaned over, placed a hand on each of their faces in turn, then drove his fist up under their noses, one after the

other—quick, surgical strikes. Crunch. Crunch. The bone folded. The septum jammed upward.

Their limbs kicked once, then nothing.

He stood for a moment. No rage, no pleasure. Just a stillness.

Then he turned, closed the door behind him, walked the length of the hall back to Room 7.

He stripped off his coat, dropped it to the floor, fell back onto the mattress, and stretched his limbs wide.

Sleep took him fast, heavy and dreamless.

Morning cracked through the filthy blinds like an interrogator's flashlight. Bob blinked once, twice, then swung his legs off the bed. His back ached in that quiet, insistent way that reminded him he was still alive. Barely.

He shuffled to the sink. The water from the tap came out cloudy, but he let it run until it cleared. He

brushed his teeth with a toothbrush too old to be trusted, stared at himself in the mirror without judgment. Just took inventory. Skin still there. Eyes open. No blood on the face. Good enough.

Shower next. The spray was lukewarm at best, more a drizzle than a wash, but it did the job. He stood under it with his hands against the tile, water tracing slow rivers down the planes of his back. No music, no thoughts. Just the sound of rusted pipes trying to do their job.

He dried off with a towel that smelled like every other body that had used it before.

Got dressed. Same coat. Same boots.

The world outside was bright, too bright, the kind of sun that made yesterday feel like a rumor. Cars passed. People existed. No one looked at him.

He started walking. No plan. Just motion. The kind that keeps the blood moving and the conscience quiet.

The squad car rolled up slow, like it was afraid of waking the building. Sunlight glanced off the windshield, too clean for a place like this. Two uniforms stepped out, one older, one trying to look like he'd seen things. They hadn't drawn their weapons yet. Not here. Not at this dump.

The manager, still in a stained undershirt and with a cigarette that never lit right, led them up the narrow staircase. He pointed down the hall with a shrug like this sort of thing happened once a season.

Room 10's door stood half-ajar. The senior officer pushed it open with two fingers and let the smell confirm what the call already had.

The couple lay exactly as Bob had left them. The man's mouth open, the woman's eyes glazed over, both faces crushed in the same brutal, upward angle.

No signs of struggle. Just precise, clean violence. Surgical. Personal.

The young cop swallowed hard. “Jesus...”

The older one crouched beside the bed. “No forced entry,” he muttered. “No defensive wounds. Whoever did this knew how to kill without waking the neighbors.”

He looked back over his shoulder at the manager.

“Who was in the room next door?”

Bob found a diner three blocks down, the kind that still had smoking sections marked by faded signs and the ghost of bacon grease soaked into every surface. The windows were fogged from cheap coffee and cheaper conversation. He liked it immediately.

He slid into a booth by the window, cracked the laminated menu open like it might bite him, then closed it again. He already knew.

The waitress came over with a pencil behind her ear and the dead-eyed cheer of someone who'd been up since 4 a.m.

“Coffee,” Bob said. “Black. And the breakfast.”

She didn't ask which one. Just nodded and shuffled off.

Outside, the street moved like it had something to prove—people with errands, lives, appointments, mistakes to make. Bob watched them with a vague disinterest, then lit a cigarette even though the sign on the table said not to. No one stopped him.

The coffee arrived. Burnt, strong, perfect. He drank half before the food came: eggs, sausage, toast, some gray hash that might've once been potatoes.

He ate slow, mechanical. Each bite a method. Each chew a meditation.

Behind him, a TV above the counter murmured about a double homicide at a local motel. Room 10. No suspects. No leads.

Bob wiped his mouth with a napkin, drained the last of the coffee, and left a crumpled bill on the table.

He stepped outside into the morning, exhaled smoke into sunlight, and walked on.

The liquor store stood on the corner like an altar to vices both petty and profound. Its windows were smeared with handprints, ads for discount vodka peeling in the sun. Fluorescent lights buzzed overhead with the zeal of dying insects.

Bob pushed the door open. The little bell above it gave a nervous jingle. He stepped inside and paused at the threshold, smiling faintly, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth—*tsk*—like a monk greeting forbidden knowledge.

This was his toy store. His reliquary. Rows of glass bottles lined the walls like saints in stained-glass windows—each with a name, a promise, a memory. The single malt corner glowed like Jerusalem.

He moved through the aisles with reverence, fingers trailing the edges of bottles, labels, corks. Bourbon. Rye. Scotch aged long enough to remember better times. Gin that smelled like regret and forest floor. Tequila that bit back.

He stopped at a shelf with a dusty bottle of Laphroaig and picked it up like it was made of bone. Smelled the cork without opening it. Smiled wider.

Behind the counter, the clerk—a man with a t-shirt that said *Life's a Drink*—nodded. “Morning.”

Bob didn't respond. Just set the bottle down with a lover's care and added two more—something French, something vicious.

“Special occasion?” the clerk asked.

Bob tilted his head, considering.

“Always,” he said.

Bob moved deeper into the store, past the branded neon signs and the cardboard cutouts of grinning drunks, into the back—where the lights buzzed slower, and the labels wore dust like monks wore habits. He walked with the solemn, measured steps of a man who knew he was being watched, if not by eyes, then by judgment itself.

Each shelf was a codex, each bottle a parchment, fermented wisdom sealed in glass. He moved his hand across them not to touch, but to read—fingers just above the surface, tracing the arcane symbols of distilleries lost to time. He muttered softly, not in words, but in ritual clicks of the tongue, the ancient liturgy of the true disciple of poison.

Then he saw it.

Behind a stack of novelty rums and ironic craft gins, half-obsured by a poster advertising "buy two, get third for pain," stood a black-lacquered cabinet, tall and narrow, with a rusted keyhole and no key. Most wouldn't notice it. Most would never even reach this part of the store. It was where liquor went to be forgotten—or remembered, depending on the visitor.

Bob crouched. Felt the sides. Clicked something loose. A tiny panel gave way under pressure from his palm. The door creaked open not with resistance, but with recognition.

Inside: a single bottle, unlabelled, no markings, just the dull sheen of aged glass and liquid as dark as confession. It had no barcode. No price. It didn't belong to the store. It didn't belong to the world.

Bob exhaled softly, reverently, as though he had reached the *finis africæ*.

He took the bottle. Held it to the light. Nothing passed through. He smiled.

“Truth,” he whispered.

The clerk called from the counter, half-bored. “Find what you need?”

Bob stepped back into the light with the bottle in hand.

“No,” he said. “I found what I deserve.”

Bob walked to the counter slow, the bottle cradled in his hand like a sacred relic. At the last moment, he plucked a bottle opener from the rack beside the breath mints—old-fashioned, with a corkscrew that folded out like a switchblade.

The clerk glanced up, already scanning. “No need for that, friend,” he said, tapping the bottle with a chipped nail. “Cork comes out naturally.”

Bob smiled. It was almost warm.

He flipped the opener open, the corkscrew glinting under the fluorescents. Then, without change in expression, he reached forward and drove it—deliberately, precisely—into the side of the man’s neck.

The clerk made a soft, startled grunt as the metal twisted through skin and found the carotid. Blood pulsed out in rhythmic bursts. Bob left the opener where it stuck, like a flag planted in conquered land.

From his coat pocket, he placed two folded bills on the counter—more than enough. Then the bottle, gently. Transaction completed. No debt owed.

He turned and walked out as the body slumped behind the till, a slow, wet collapse.

The street was louder now. A dog barked. A child cried about something unimportant. Bob walked past it all, unhurried, as if carrying groceries.

At the motel, he climbed the stairs two at a time and slipped back into Room 7. The door closed behind him with a quiet *click*.

Across the hall, Room 10 had been sealed off. Yellow tape. Flashing lights. Crime Scene Investigation. Blue gloves on hands. Flashbulbs. Murmurs. Photos.

No one noticed Room 7.

Bob set the bottle on the bedside table. Sat on the edge of the bed. Unzipped his coat. Listened to the hum of the vending machine down the hall.

Then, very gently, he began to hum. A tune with no name. Something old. Something that didn't want to be remembered.

Bob unscrewed the cap—because, of course, the clerk had lied, the cork wasn't natural, it was plastic and modern and designed for speed, not reverence—and poured the thick, amber liquid into a motel tumbler

that still bore the faint lipstick kiss of someone else's mistake.

He drank.

Not a sip. A baptism.

The burn hit like a warm slap from a friend you owe money to. He exhaled through his nose, blinked once, and let his spine melt back onto the cheap bedspread. The ceiling above him was cracked in a shape that vaguely resembled Florida or the profile of Nixon, but Bob wasn't in the mood for politics.

He drank again.

And then it came.

Like fog rolling through a cartoon cave, like a tap from memory's shoulder—he started to sing.

“Flintstones… meet the Flintstones… they’re the modern Stone Age family…”

He raised the glass.

“From the town of Bedrock…” a long pause for a slow drink, *“they’re a page right out of his-tor-eee.”*

A chuckle. Then a croaky attempt at bass:

“Yogi Bear is smarter than the average bear…”

He shifted in bed, rolled to one elbow.

“Scooby-Doo, where are you? We got some work to do now…”

He snapped his fingers, off-beat. The bottle was already half-gone. His voice cracked somewhere between childhood and obliteration.

“Scooby-Doo, if you come through, you’re gonna have yourself a Scooby snack!”

He laughed. Alone. Loud. Free.

Outside, the CSI team in Room 10 was dusting for prints, photographing the bedspread, logging entry wounds, debating motives.

Inside Room 7, Bob poured another drink and launched into a warbled version of the *Jetsons* theme, voice climbing like a malfunctioning elevator.

“Meet George Jetson... his boy Elroy...”

He drank until the toons blurred.

Then silence again. Blessed, stupid silence.

Bob stepped out into the daylight like it owed him nothing, coat flapping lightly in the breeze, bottle tucked under one arm like a newspaper. The motel parking lot buzzed with blue lights and uniformed insects, the chorus of radios, cameras, and gloves snapping tight.

He walked the perimeter with the calm of a man on a smoke break.

The first patrol car sat fat and parked by the yellow tape. He moved past it, pausing just long enough to kneel and tie a bootlace that wasn't untied. When he rose, the fuel cap was loose.

He unscrewed it with two fingers, reached into his coat, pulled out a plain paper bag. Sugar. Coarse. White. Pure sabotage. He poured slowly, the grains falling like malicious snow into the tank. Then screwed the cap back on with care.

Second car. A pause. A look around. No one noticed.

Repeat.

By the time he reached the fifth car, the bag was light and the bottle under his arm had warmed against his ribs. He stood, hands in pockets, watched the forensics team buzzing around Room 10, one of them vomiting into the flower bed.

Bob clicked his tongue again—*tsk*—and turned down the block.

There was a name he remembered. José.

A boy. Ten, maybe eleven. Big eyes. Quick fingers.
Knew the alleys like saints knew guilt.

Bob walked deeper into town, where the gutters
curled and kids ran shoeless past cars that wouldn't
start tomorrow.

“José,” he called softly, like a question he already
knew the answer to.

Somewhere in the distance, a soccer ball bounced
against a wall.

Bob followed the sound.

The alleys narrowed, the buildings leaned in like they
had secrets. Bob moved through them without haste,
the bottle swinging gently at his side, the sugar bag
now folded into a tight, empty cube in his coat.

He turned a corner and there was the ball—scuffed, stitched, held together more by stubbornness than leather. It rolled once, hit his boot, and stopped.

He stepped over it.

Two boys darted into view, chasing after it. One was taller, mop-haired, sprinting. The other slowed as soon as he saw Bob.

That one was José.

He froze mid-stride. His eyes flicked down to the bottle, then up to Bob's face.

Bob raised a hand—not waving, not threatening, just there.

“Hola, José.”

José didn't speak. Not yet. His breath puffed visibly in the air, a little cloud of wariness.

Bob crouched, slowly, until he was at the boy's eye level.

"I need something," he said, voice level, almost kind.
"Not much. Just a word. A place. Maybe a door."

José swallowed. Nodded once.

His friend tugged at his sleeve, whispering something, but José ignored it.

He stepped forward, picked up the ball, and pointed with his chin toward a crumbling doorway up the block.

"Behind the fish shop," he said. "Metal stairs. Door with three locks."

Bob nodded. "Gracias."

He reached into his coat again—not for a weapon, not for sugar—but for a folded bill. He handed it to the boy. Not large enough to draw attention. Just enough to mean, *I see you*.

José took it silently.

Bob straightened up and started walking.

The door with three locks was waiting.

Bob circled the block slowly, the way fog loops a hill. A stray dog barked once, then thought better of it. By the time he came back around, José was still near the alley's mouth, alone now, juggling the soccer ball off his knee, one-two-three, like rhythm could protect him.

Bob approached soundlessly.

The strike was precise—a sharp edge of the palm to the base of the neck, just where thought meets spine. José dropped without a sound, crumpling like cloth.

Bob caught him before he hit the ground, gathered him up into his arms like a tired nephew, like a sleeping son. His head lolled against Bob's shoulder, his limbs loose, his breath soft.

No one saw. No one looked.

He carried him past the shuttered fish shop, up the metal stairs, to the door with three locks. He opened them easily—tools had been used before, knowledge was already there.

Inside, the room was cold and unfinished. Concrete walls. Rusted light hanging from a frayed cord. A table in the center, heavy wood, the kind that once held carcasses and now waited for other kinds.

Bob laid José down gently. Strapped his wrists. His ankles. Removed the boy's shoes with the care of someone preparing a ritual. Set them aside neatly, like they mattered.

Then he pulled a folding knife from his coat and sat by the boy's feet.

He looked at the small, soft soles. Flexed his fingers. Unfolded the blade.

“Like José Sánchez del Río,” Bob said, almost a whisper. “The martyr. The little Cristero. You’re gonna suffer a lot of pain. Just like him.”

He touched the blade to the skin. Not cutting. Just letting it rest there.

The boy began to stir.

José’s eyelids fluttered. First confusion. Then fear. His limbs tugged weakly against the straps, but they held. The table groaned beneath him.

His breath came in sharp, wet pulls, panic blooming fast. The room smelled of mildew, metal, and something worse—anticipation.

Bob sat motionless beside him, the knife balanced across his fingers like a communion wafer.

He waited.

When the boy's eyes finally locked onto his—wide, darting, beginning to understand—Bob leaned forward, calm as confession.

“Like José Sánchez del Río,” he said again, slow and solemn, as if reciting scripture. “The martyr. The little Cristero. You’re gonna suffer a lot of pain. Just like him.”

He let the blade kiss the arch of the boy’s foot. Not cutting. Not yet. Just letting the cold metal speak for him.

“I’m going to slit your feet palms open.”

José jerked in the restraints, his mouth opening in a silent scream before any sound could reach it. He twisted, whimpered, eyes wild.

“No, no, please—please, no—”

His words were tangled, high-pitched, the raw, primal stammer of someone staring into the face of pain and understanding it might come slow.

Bob didn't blink. Didn't move. Just watched.

José kept struggling, the panic now thick in his throat. His heels scraped uselessly against the wood.

Bob raised the knife slightly.

And waited for the boy to understand that there would be no rescue.

Bob waited until José's cries had dwindled to ragged sobs, the boy's chest heaving under the coarse strap that bit into his shoulders. He leaned forward, blade in hand, and began exactly as the Cristeros had recorded: he cut the skin on the top of José's right foot, dragging the knife slowly from heel to ball. The blade tore through flesh with a wet, grated sound. José screamed, arching his back against the restraints, but Bob held him still. He repeated the motion on the sole, slicing deeper, exposing raw muscle and tendon. Blood pooled on the wooden plank beneath, darkening the grain.

When the right foot was done, Bob shifted to the left, mirroring each incision: heel to toes, toes to heel. Warm, sticky rivulets of blood trailed down the boy's ankle and dripped onto the floor. José's eyes rolled back. His voice had broken long before.

Bob paused, watched the blood drip for a moment, as if committing the pattern to memory. Then he stood, retrieving a length of coarse rope, and bound José's feet to the table's legs to prevent him from curling away. With the boy's legs spread, Bob took two small iron hooks from his coat and, replicating the stories of the 14-year-old martyr, he inserted one hook into the flesh of each sole, just below the arch, and twisted, wrenching flesh upward. José's body jerked violently with each twist, the hooks creaking like ancient hinges.

Still maintaining that same hollow calm, Bob lifted a tin basin from the corner, set it at José's feet, and filled it with a mixture of salt, lime, and chile powder—ingredients meant to corrode, to burn open what had already been torn. He dipped a rag in the

mixture and pressed it to José's bleeding soles. The boy's scream ricocheted off the concrete walls, a raw thing. Bob held the rag until it fell soggy and useless, then tossed it aside.

José's breath came in gurgling gasps. His eyes were unfocused, fixed on the ceiling as if searching for an escape.

Bob knelt between the boy's knees, unfolded a small, tarnished medallion depicting Christ on the cross, and held it an inch from José's face.

"Viva Cristo Rey," Bob said softly, echoing the words of the young martyr. José tried to repeat them but his tongue was curled in pain. Bob pressed the medallion so that the edge cut the skin of José's cheek, drawing a thin line of blood. "Viva Cristo Rey," he repeated, forcing José's head back to meet the pendant. José's lips parted, but the words were swallowed by a wheezing sob.

Bob rose, stepping back. He produced a small pistol, the barrel still warm from practice. He cocked it methodically, aiming at José's chest. José's eyes found Bob's, clarity returning for a moment as understanding—his final communion—flooded through them. Bob paused, finger on the trigger, and José murmured, "Viva Cristo Rey," his voice a fragile whisper.

Bob nodded and pulled the trigger. The gun kicked hard, the report echoing in the tiny room. José's body went limp, eyes staring at the ceiling. Bob let the pistol drop, watched the boy slump sideways on the table, the hooks still in his feet, the medallion clutched in his hand.

He backed away, gathering his coat, and moved to the corner where his bloody tools lay. With deliberate care, he wiped the blade clean on José's shirt, folded it, and tucked it into his pocket. The hooks he tossed into the basin. He turned off the single dangling light, leaving the room shrouded in darkness except for the faint glow of dawn seeping through the

narrow window. Then Bob left, closing the door softly behind him.

Bob walked the long way back to Room 7, the kind of route that makes you feel like you've earned your silence. The sun was up but hadn't burned off the motel's habitual rot. Room 10 was still wrapped in tape and murmurs, crawling with the white-suited ants of investigation.

He ignored it all.

Back at his door, he dragged a plastic lawn chair out from under the motel's sad excuse for an awning. It screeched against the concrete like it resented being moved. He sat, slouched deep, bottle in hand, legs stretched out as if on holiday.

The bottle was nearly gone now. He poured the last few fingers into the motel tumbler. It caught the light like amber and lies.

From his vantage point, he could see the patrol cars lined up near the scene, resting like armored cattle. Blue and white. Marked and serious. Four of them, maybe five. A few uniforms hovered nearby, sipping coffee from paper cups, gesturing lazily.

Bob took a drink and lit a cigarette, the paper crinkling as the tip caught. He leaned back and watched.

Then, as if on cue, one of the officers flicked a key fob.

The first engine tried to turn.

Once. Twice. Choke. Gurgle. Nothing.

Another officer climbed into a second vehicle. Turned the ignition. A cough. Then a series of slow, mechanical sputters—like a man trying to breathe through concrete.

Third car. Same story.

Bob smiled around his cigarette.

Soon enough, hoods were lifted, hands scratching heads, someone yelling for the nearest mechanic. Radios buzzed with irritation.

One of the cars actually backfired and vomited a puff of acrid white smoke that smelled like syrup and ruin.

Bob sat and drank and watched it all unfold, the slow chaos of sabotage blooming like rot beneath polite metal and protocol. A whole fleet crippled by breakfast.

He poured the last drop of whisky into the glass, lifted it in a mock salute to no one in particular, and whispered:

“Sugar and gasoline. Gospel and truth.”

Bob slipped back inside Room 7, the door clicking shut behind him like a final verdict. He moved to the corner where the flickering bulb cast long, lazy shadows. Slowly, deliberately, he unbuttoned his

coat, peeling it off like a second skin that had grown too tight.

He sat on the edge of the lumpy bed, hands tracing old scars beneath the fabric. The room smelled of stale smoke and forgotten regrets. His fingers found what they sought, moving with the slow precision of ritual.

The world narrowed to sensation, to breath, to the pounding pulse that built like thunder in his veins.

When the climax came, it tore through him like a scream caught in a hurricane. He yelled—raw, primal, the sound ripping from somewhere deep and ancient. The carpet beneath him soaked the evidence in crimson stain and sticky warmth.

Spent and hollow, Bob lay back, eyes closing against the harsh light leaking through the cracked blinds. The echoes of the scream lingered, fading into the silence.

Finally, the silence won.

He drifted off, the dark folding over him like a cloak.

Afternoon light leaked into the room in thick, dusty shafts, stretching across the stained carpet where sweat, whiskey, and climax had dried into anonymous history. Bob opened one eye, then the other, his head thick with the aftertaste of sleep and triumph.

He scratched his chest absently, sat up, and shuffled to the window.

Outside, the scene was almost comedic.

Two of the patrol cars were already hooked up to tow trucks, tilted at dumb angles like livestock being dragged to market. Another had its hood still open, an officer staring in with the helplessness of a man who knew he'd never pass a mechanical exam. A third truck reversed with a loud *beep-beep*, preparing to haul away the last casualty.

Sugar and gasoline had done their work.

Engines caramelized into stillbirth. Pistons locked like clenched jaws. Radios dead. Lights mute.

Bob lit a cigarette and exhaled against the glass, watching the tow chain tighten.

A detective in a tan coat pointed at one of the cars, gesturing wildly, his face stuck somewhere between confusion and bureaucratic fury.

Bob took another drag.

Then he smiled.

And whispered, "Sweet."

Bob stepped back into the diner as if he'd never left. The bell over the door gave its tired jingle, announcing his return like a bad habit. The same fluorescent buzz. The same sagging booths. The same clock ticking above the coffee pots like it regretted every second.

He sat at the same booth by the window. A different waitress this time—older, limping slightly, her uniform stained in the way that suggested it had survived more than just spills. She approached with the weary posture of someone expecting nothing good to come from men who sit alone.

Bob looked up, folded his hands.

“I’d like a cinnamon tarte Tatin,” he said, voice smooth.

The waitress blinked. “We don’t have that.”

She didn’t say it cruelly. Just plainly. Honestly. A diner like this never had tarte Tatin, cinnamon or otherwise.

Bob looked at her for a moment, eyes flat. Then he stood up.

Without a word, he reached across the counter to the tray stand. Took the steak knife resting on the service

mat, turned it in his hand once like checking its weight, then stepped around the booth.

She had only time to exhale before he slid the blade into her chest—upward, between the ribs. Once. Deep. Quick. She collapsed like a dropped apron.

No one screamed. Not right away.

Bob laid the knife on the counter, next to the register, straightened his coat, and walked back out into the light, the bell over the door giving one last jingle behind him.

Sirens hadn't started yet. The world outside continued, absurdly unbothered. Traffic flowed. A man in a suit cursed at his phone. Pigeons pecked at a piece of donut someone had thrown into the gutter. Life, indifferent and stupid, didn't even blink.

Bob walked half a block before stopping in front of a laundromat, watched the drum of a washing machine spin through the window—shirts and socks tumbling

in blind panic. He lit a cigarette, drew deep, exhaled slow.

Then came the sirens, distant but rising. The diner was behind him now, and with it the woman he'd left cooling against the linoleum. People would run. The busboy would scream. The coffee would turn bitter.

Bob kept walking.

He ducked into an alley with the fluidity of someone who didn't need to hide—he simply preferred shadows. Cut through a broken fence, over a dumpster, past a cat so indifferent it didn't flinch.

He moved like routine, like habit. He didn't look back.

The city, bloated and busy, had gears too slow to catch him.

He knew it would take them time—time to process the diner, time to connect the woman's chest wound

to the man who'd asked for French dessert in a place that barely understood pie. Time they didn't have.

He had more to do.

In the alley's dim damp, between the breath of dumpsters and the rust-slick hiss of a leaking pipe, a sewer rat stepped out with the deliberate authority of a landlord. It paused directly in Bob's path, black eyes unblinking, whiskers twitching with the curiosity of something too small to care and too old to fear.

Bob stopped.

They stared at each other for a moment—the man and the rat, both survivors, both covered in cities and sins.

Then Bob looked down.

At the edge of a puddle, soggy and gray, lay a sandwich. Long dead. Abandoned by its cowardly eater. He picked it up. Peeled away the top slice, flicked off a cigarette butt. Took a sniff. Frowned.

He tore off a chunk and crouched, hand extended.

The rat stepped forward cautiously. Sniffed. Took the offering with both paws and retreated a step to eat. Bob gave another. It ate again. More. More still. No hesitation now.

“Smart bastard,” Bob muttered.

When the sandwich was gone, the rat crept forward, climbed up the toe of Bob’s boot, paused on his shin, and waited. Bob opened his coat slightly. The rat crawled in without ceremony and vanished inside the lining like it had always belonged there.

He stood. Smoked. Nodded once, as if a deal had been struck.

“Name’s yours to pick,” he told the rat. “But rent’s paid in silence and claws when needed.”

They walked on together, the city unaware that something small and sharp had just joined the storm.

Bob emerged from the alley with the rat now curled inside his coat, nestled near his ribs like a heartbeat that didn't quite belong to him. The street smelled of rain on asphalt and fried oil, overlaid with the distant perfume of sirens already too late.

He moved with purpose. The kind of gait that didn't chase, didn't rush—just knew the city would offer someone. It always did. Cities breed victims like damp breeds mold.

He passed a corner where a street preacher shouted about judgment and salvation. Bob paused, tilted his head.

No. Too loud. Too willing.

He moved on.

Past a cafe. Too many witnesses.

Past a park. Too clean.

Then he saw him. A man in an expensive coat, walking like the sidewalk was made for him. Leather gloves. Designer bag. Looking down at his phone, swiping through something utterly forgettable.

Perfect.

Bob followed a while, letting the distance close naturally. The man turned into a narrow street behind a row of shuttered shops—a shortcut, a mistake.

Bob quickened slightly. The rat stirred in his coat but did not emerge.

He reached into his pocket and felt the handle of a short, rust-spotted utility blade. Not elegant, but pain never needed to be.

The man stopped to check his phone again. Bob was right behind him.

“Excuse me,” he said, voice soft and patient.

The man turned.

And the city exhaled.

Bob didn't strike immediately. He smiled, polite, even warm—an echo of human decency used only for camouflage. The man blinked, confused, a laugh halfway up his throat when Bob jabbed the blade hard into his thigh. Not deep. Just enough to buckle him.

By the time he hit the ground, Bob had already dragged him into the narrow alcove behind the shuttered flower shop—same alley, different angle. A hidden hatch, a forgotten set of stairs, damp concrete descending like a throat swallowing the world.

Down they went.

The room hadn't changed. Table. Straps. Tools. Stains that had once been red. A faint smell of metal, rot, and devotion.

Bob strapped the man in with practiced ease. Wrists first. Then ankles. Then, just for the poetry of it, a strip of cloth across the mouth—tight enough to muffle, loose enough to let whimpers leak through.

The man's eyes darted, bulging, terrified. Bob didn't speak for a long time. He simply knelt at the foot of the table, drew the blade again, and ran the flat side gently across the man's left sole.

The rat peeked out from his coat, sniffed, then nestled back in.

Bob began.

One clean slice, from heel to toes. The skin peeled back like overripe fruit. The man thrashed—futile, contained. Blood came in slow rivers, pooling at the base of the foot before dripping, dripping, dripping.

Bob repeated the gesture on the right sole, slower this time, letting the pain spread wide before going deep.

When both feet were opened, red and raw, Bob sat back and admired the symmetry.

He reached for the salt.

Bob reached into his coat and gently cupped the rat in his hand, lifting it with the same tenderness a priest might show a wafer before communion.

The rat blinked, its nose twitching, whiskers alive with anticipation or instinct or simply appetite.

Bob brought it close to the man's face.

"He lives with me now," Bob said, calm as a lullaby. "He's clean. He's fed. But he's still a rat."

He placed the rat gently at the man's feet—those soft, split soles, raw and pulsing like meat fresh from a butcher's block. The blood was thick, the flesh trembling.

The rat sniffed. Paused.

Then took a bite.

It started with a nibble, tentative. The man's body jolted as if struck by lightning. A muffled scream surged from beneath the cloth, his eyes wide and liquid with disbelief. He bucked, twisted, rattled the table.

The rat bit again. Deeper.

The man's face contorted, snot and tears streaming. His veins stood out like rope, muscles seizing, every nerve raw and screaming.

Bob didn't look away.

The rat found rhythm—small, greedy bites, chewing, swallowing. Blood smeared its snout. The man's screams now came in gasping waves, his body doing a helpless dance of resistance that had no choreography, only desperation.

Bob watched, stone still, one hand resting lightly on the table's edge.

“Pain,” he said, almost absently, “is honesty.”

The rat kept eating.

Bob sat with his elbows on his knees, hands clasped like a man watching a fireplace, utterly absorbed. The rat was hard at work now—chewing deeper into the raw meat of the man’s feet, tendons stretching, small bones cracking delicately beneath tiny incisors. The room was filled with the wet sound of gnawing and the muffled, trembling moans of a man trying and failing to scream through a gag.

Bob smiled. A broad, patient, satisfied smile. Not manic. Not cruel in the usual sense. Just… content.

He leaned in closer, watched the man's face—pale, slick with tears, the eyes fluttering, bulging, the mouth moving behind the gag in pitiful spasms of pleading.

“Oh come on,” Bob murmured. “You’re embarrassing both of us.”

The man groaned, his body lurching again, wrists yanking helplessly against the straps.

“Don’t be shy,” Bob said. “Cry if you need to. It’s healthy. Cleansing. Therapeutic.”

The rat paused only to lick its paws, then dove back in with enthusiasm. The man’s right leg trembled violently, the foot twitching in reflexive panic.

“Honestly,” Bob said, cocking his head, “you’re doing better than the last guy. He passed out before the third bite. You—you’re staying in it. Present. That’s admirable.”

The man gave a long, rattling sob from somewhere deep in his ribs.

Bob laughed softly. “There it is,” he whispered. “There’s the music.”

He lit a cigarette, leaned back in the chair, and watched his pet work, the rat’s snout buried in red

ruin, and the man's face a portrait of exquisite, useless suffering.

Bob's laughter bubbled up low and dark, rolling through the cramped room like a storm with nowhere to go. He leaned forward, eyes gleaming with cruel delight as the man writhed, muffled cries spilling past the cloth gag.

"Oh, don't think I don't hear you," Bob said, voice dripping mockery. "All that whining, begging, howling—it's music to my ears. Really, it is."

He shook his head slowly, savoring the moment like fine whiskey. "You act like pain's a curse when it's your ticket to the show. Everyone loves a good performance."

The man thrashed harder, tears carving rivers down his face, but Bob only grinned wider, arms crossed, basking in the twisted spectacle.

“Come on, wimp,” he sneered softly. “You’re making it far too easy. Where’s your fight? Your fire? Or are you just another broken note in a sad song?”

Bob’s laughter filled the room again—sharp, relentless, merciless—as the rat continued its merciless feast, and the man’s muffled cries grew desperate beneath the weight of agony and mockery.

The man’s breath hitched, eyes searching Bob’s face—fear tangled with something else, something fragile and raw. Bob’s fingers lingered a moment longer, tracing the sharp contours of pain and vulnerability, then slid down to tighten the straps that held the man fast.

The kiss had shattered something, or perhaps ignited it.

Bob stood slowly, the weight of the room shifting like a tide. He picked up the knife again, its blade catching the dim light as if eager for the next ritual.

He approached the man's feet once more, voice low and steady.

"Pain is truth," he said. "And you, my friend, are about to learn to speak it fluently."

The blade traced new lines along the fresh wounds, deeper, sharper—each cut a word, each slice a sentence, each scream a confession.

The rat watched from the corner, eyes gleaming in the dark.

Bob smiled.

This was just the beginning.

The man's muffled cries twisted through the room like a fractured melody, raw and jagged against the cold concrete walls. Bob moved with deliberate patience, each incision careful and precise—no rush, no mercy, just the steady rhythm of pain unraveling defenses.

He traced a jagged path along the arches of the feet, peeling back skin like the pages of a dark manuscript, revealing raw muscle and fragile sinew beneath. The man's body convulsed with each slice, the straps creaking under the strain, but Bob held firm, eyes unwavering.

"Speak," Bob whispered, voice low and commanding, "in the only language that matters."

The rat scurried forward, nose twitching, drawn to the scent of fresh ruin. It darted between the man's trembling legs, then paused, eyes locking onto Bob's.

Bob nodded—a silent command.

The rat's teeth gleamed as it began to gnaw, small bites sending shudders through the man's frame. He screamed then, a raw, guttural sound that shook the room, tearing through the gag and filling the silence with shattered agony.

Bob watched, a dark satisfaction curling his lips.

Pain was the truth.

And tonight, he was its cruelest teacher.

Bob stayed silent, savoring every guttural scream that clawed its way past the man's gag. The raw, ragged noise filled the room like a twisted hymn, each sob and cry a confession written in agony. The rat worked relentlessly, its sharp teeth sinking into the tender flesh, driving the man closer to the edge where pain and surrender blurred.

Bob circled the table slowly, eyes glinting with cold amusement. He leaned down, close enough that the man could feel his breath—hot, steady, unyielding.

“You thought this was just about suffering,” Bob murmured, voice smooth and merciless. “But it’s more than that. It’s about breaking you open, stripping away the lies until only truth remains. And trust me… you’re going to love the honesty.”

He straightened, flicked ash from his cigarette, and exhaled slowly. The rat paused, lifted its head, and looked at Bob as if awaiting permission.

With a nod, Bob gestured, and the small creature returned to its feast.

Outside, distant sirens wove through the city's hum, unaware of the darkness unfolding behind closed doors.

The man's body had stopped jerking in full spasms. Now it trembled—rhythmic, shallow shakes that ran up his legs and through his torso like tremors after an earthquake. His skin had gone pale, the kind of pale that wasn't just fear anymore—it was the beginning of a system shutting down. His feet, once twitching wildly under the rat's gnawing, had begun to stiffen. The blood no longer pulsed from the wounds; it oozed slowly, thick, dark, as pressure dropped.

He was going into shock.

Bob leaned over and checked his eyes. One pupil slightly more dilated than the other. The man's breath came quick and shallow, chest rising in fast little jerks. The gag was soaked now—not just from saliva, but from the fluid beginning to leak from the man's mouth. A thin, pinkish froth bubbled at the edges of his lips.

“You’re slipping,” Bob said, almost tenderly. “You’re not dying yet. But the body’s trying to.”

He undid the gag. The man tried to speak, but the words collapsed into a wet gargle. His voice was gone, either from the screaming or from his throat swelling up, but the eyes—the eyes still begged. Still pled.

The feet were wrecked. Tendons exposed, most of the skin chewed or sliced away. One toe was gone completely, likely swallowed. The rat had moved on to gnawing at the soft space near the inner arch, digging deeper now, seeking warmth where nerves still lived.

The man's breathing hitched again, a dry heave with no stomach left to give.

Bob reached for a rag, wiped some blood from the corner of the man's mouth. Not out of kindness. Just to see the expression.

He was close. Not to death—but to that soft, blurry place before unconsciousness where pain folds into numbness and the brain starts letting go, as if saying: *We tried. Good luck.*

Bob leaned close.

“Don't pass out yet,” he whispered. “That's the coward's way out. You've got more to feel.”

He reached into his coat. Drew a small steel tool, the kind used for gripping—fine-tipped, sharp. Pinched the exposed tendon in the man's left foot, right under the arch, and pulled. Not hard. Just enough.

The man convulsed. A fresh jolt of adrenaline surged through him, and for a moment, the body remembered it wanted to live.

His eyes widened again. His mouth opened. No sound came out.

Bob smiled.

“There you are,” he said. “Welcome back.”

The rat paused mid-gnaw, blood slick on its snout, whiskers twitching in the sticky air. It turned its small head toward Bob, black eyes gleaming, teeth bared in what almost—*almost*—resembled a grin.

It chirped once. A tiny sound, sharp and curious.

Bob tilted his head, amused. “There?” he asked softly, following the rat’s gaze.

The rat had stopped near the tendon Bob had just pulled, the pink string of exposed fiber still trembling where it hung, quivering like a taut violin string.

Bob gave a slow nod.

“Yes,” he said. “You may.”

The rat’s body tensed with eagerness, claws clicking against the wood as it scurried back into position. Its tiny mouth opened, and it bit—clean, fast—right through the tendon.

The man didn’t scream. Not audibly. His mouth opened wide, jaw stretched to a breaking point, and a dry, wheezing gasp burst from deep in his chest. His back arched hard, his eyes rolled upward, and for a second, the heart must’ve skipped—flirted with arrest.

The leg kicked reflexively, but weak now. Only one good jerk left in it. Then it collapsed, limp, the muscles around the foot dead and useless.

The rat chewed methodically, like it knew exactly what it was doing.

Bob reached out and gently patted the little creature on the head. It nuzzled his finger, then went back to work.

“Good boy,” Bob said.

The man’s body twitched once more.

Then stilled. Not dead. But sinking.

Bob waited to see if the eyes would come back. If not, he knew how to bring them.

Bob stared at the rat gnawing cheerfully on the shredded tendon, its tiny jaw working like a clockmaker's hands. He yawned. Loudly. Blinked.

He looked at the man—now barely conscious, blood leaking in soft pulses, face glazed over like the display chicken in a butcher’s case. Then back to the rat. Then the man. Then the rat again.

Another yawn. Longer this time. A sigh followed.

“Oh sod it,” Bob muttered. “I didn’t wanna do this. I don’t wanna be a psycho murderer. I don’t wanna kill all day.”

He stood suddenly, stretched theatrically, arms above his head, spine popping.

“I wanted to be… a lumberjack!”

He turned in place, arms flailing with exuberant flair.

“Leaping from tree to tree! As they float down the mighty rivers of British Columbia!”

The rat paused mid-chew. Tilted its head.

“The giant redwood! The larch! The fir! The mighty Scots pine!”

He clutched the rat to his chest and twirled with it in a grotesque little waltz, the dead-eyed victim twitching gently in the background.

“The lofty flowering cherry! The plucky little aspen!
The *limping* Roo tree of Nigeria!”

He kissed the rat square on the head.

“The towering Wattle of Aldershot! The Maidenhead
Weeping Water Plant! The *naughty* Leicestershire
Flashing Oak! The *flatulent* Elm of West Ruislip! The
Quercus Maximus Bamber Gascoigni!”

He whirled again, one foot slipping in blood but
regaining balance like a true showman.

“The Epigillus! The *Barter Hughius Greenus!*”

He stopped, chest heaving, rat raised triumphantly in
the air.

“With my best buddy by my side—” he squeezed the
rat lovingly, who squeaked in either joy or trauma,
“—*we’d sing! Sing! Sing!*”

He cleared his throat, stood tall, and bellowed with
the pride of a man returning to his destiny:

**“I’m a lumberjack and I’m OK!
I sleep all night and I work all day!”**

The rat squeaked again. Possibly harmonizing.

Bob dropped to his knees in the sticky pool of gore, arms spread wide like the final pose in a musical number.

From the table, the man groaned one last time—weak, pitiful, utterly confused.

Bob turned to him, eyes shining.

“And *you*, sir... have ruined the solo.”

Bob turned dramatically, still on his knees in the congealing pool of blood, the rat perched on his shoulder like a particularly bloodthirsty epaulette. He pointed with theatrical flourish at the man’s flayed, chewed-up foot—specifically the tendon, or what remained of it, now limp and gnawed halfway to God-knows-where.

He paused, tilted his head, let the moment breathe.

Then, with impeccable deadpan, he declared:

“Well *that’s* what I call a dead parrot.”

The rat squeaked approvingly.

The man, barely clinging to the idea of existence, let out something between a whimper and the dying gasp of a confused accordion.

Bob stood, arms akimbo. “It’s stone dead. Passed on. It has ceased to be. It’s expired and gone to meet its maker.”

He leaned in closer to the foot.

“Bereft of life, it rests in peace. If you hadn’t nailed it to the perch, it’d be pushing up the daisies.”

He turned and addressed the unconscious man like a disappointed shopkeeper.

“This is an *ex-tendon*.”

He turned to the rat.

“Fancy a shrubbery next?”

The rat did a little circle in place and licked its paw.

“Thought so.”

Bob froze mid-prance, mid-monologue, one blood-slick boot still raised like he’d been about to break into a can-can.

The man on the table—shredded, broken, more wound than flesh—let out a rattling wheeze. Then, with the sheer, spiteful power of a dying man who refused to go out on a whimper, he croaked:

“Your mother… was a hamster… and your father… smelt of elderberries!”

Bob blinked.

The rat stopped mid-lick.

A full beat passed.

Then Bob stepped back, hand to his chest as if struck by a dueling glove soaked in citrus and medieval insult.

“Oh,” he gasped, eyes wide, mouth agape. “Oh my *God*. You *dare*.”

He turned, arms flailing, as though appealing to an invisible audience of powdered French noblemen.

“*This*... *this* is outrageous! I give you artisanal foot trauma, handcrafted by a licensed sadist, accompanied by a live rat performance—and *that’s* how you repay me? With *French taunting?*!”

The man coughed blood and a tooth, smiling faintly.

Bob leaned in, nose to nose, furious and trembling with theatrical indignation.

“You *know* what happens now, don’t you?”

The man coughed again. “Do your worst, lumberjack.”

Bob whispered, "I shall... taunt you a second time."
Then pulled out a kazoo from his coat pocket, placed it to his lips, and played *La Marseillaise* terribly.

The rat squeaked the rhythm on a tin spoon.

Somewhere in the distance, logic packed a suitcase and left.

Bob stood tall, coat flaring slightly as he inhaled deeply, kazoo still dangling from one hand, rat perched triumphantly on his shoulder like a bloodstained cherub of doom.

He pointed one finger at the man on the table, whose breath now came in thin, rattling strands, consciousness flickering like a candle in a storm.

Bob narrowed his eyes.

Then, with the authority of a medieval shrubbery inspector and the righteousness of a man who had truly, utterly snapped, he declared:

"NI!"

The sound hit the man like a thunderclap from absurd heaven.

His eyes widened. His jaw slackened.

And just like that—his body gave up. No final scream, no great speech, no orchestra swell. Just the long exhale of a soul that realized the punchline had landed and the show was over.

Bob stood in silence for a moment. The rat removed its little hat. A gesture of respect.

Then Bob sighed.

“Well,” he said, wiping his hands on the man’s shirt, “he got off easy.”

He turned to the rat.

“You want tea?”

The rat nodded.

“What d’ya like?” Bob asked, adjusting his coat and flicking a chunk of something unidentifiable off his boot.

The rat, perched on his shoulder like a morally ambiguous conscience, lifted its head proudly and burst into song with zero warning and full commitment:

“I like Chinese, I like Chinese,
They come from a long way overseas!
But they’re cute, and they’re cuddly, and they’re
ready to please—
I like Chinese food, the waiters never are rude…”

Bob blinked.

“…Think the many things they’ve done to impress,
There’s Maoism, Taoism, I Ching and chess!
I like Chinese, I like Chinese,
I like their tiny little trees!
Their zen, their ping-pong, their ying and yang-eze!”

The rat finished with a little jazz paw flourish and squeaked for applause.

Bob stared. Deadpan.

“Well,” he said slowly, “that’s even offending to *my* grade of morals.”

The rat turned, offended. “*What?* I didn’t even call them *Chinamen*.”

Bob’s eyes narrowed. “You just did.”

Rat: “When?”

Bob: “Right now.”

Rat: “No I didn’t.”

Bob: “Yes, you did.”

Rat: “No I didn’t.”

Bob: “Yes, you *did*.”

Rat: “No I di—wait, hang on... no, *you* said it.”

Bob: “But *you* said I said it after *you* said it.”

Rat: “Which I didn’t!”

Bob: “But you said you didn’t say it, *after* saying it.”

Rat (crossing arms): “That’s entrapment.”

Bob: “That’s rodent racism.”

The rat gasped. “I *have* Asian friends!”

Bob: “You ate one last week!”

Rat: “He was already dead! And Taiwanese!”

Bob sighed, lit a cigarette, and kept walking. “We're getting dumplings and not talking.”

Rat: “...Pork?”

Bob: “You’re kosher now.”

Rat: “Ugh. Anti-ratite.”

Rat: "You know who are pigs?"

Bob: "Who?"

Rat: "People who torture and kill entire other people."

Bob: (smirks) "Oh, that's me!"

Rat: "Yeah, but I mean *including* women and children. Systematically. Starvation, famine, genocide."

Bob: (frown setting in) "You mean the Brandbands?"

Rat: "Yes. They suffered it from 1939 to 1945. And now they're doing it to others."

Bob: (blinking slowly) "Dude..."

Rat: "*Prove me wrong.*"

Bob: "Dude."

Rat: "What they're doing to the Shangans."

Bob: (silent... eyes shifting... exhale) "...ok, fair."

A long pause.

They both stared at the cracked sidewalk, as if expecting it to offer moral clarity.

Rat: "Well. That got dark."

Bob: "Yeah."

Rat: (sighs) "Still want dumplings?"

Bob: "Now more than ever."

Bob stood still for a beat. Then the rat, now on his shoulder with a gleam in its eye and zero regard for political fallout, raised a tiny paw.

And together, without music, without shame, they began to dance.

"I like Chinese, I like Chinese,
They only come up to your knees,

Yet they're wise, and they're witty, and they're ready to please!"

Bob spun once—clumsily, blood still on his boots—arms wide like a man on a Parisian cabaret stage. The rat leapt from his shoulder, landed on the floor, and broke into an uncanny Charleston, little claws tapping out rhythm against cracked pavement.

Bob high-kicked. Nearly pulled a hamstring. Didn't care.

**"They've got Confucius and Sun Tzu,
And dumplings that will conquer you,
They've got ping-pong, tai chi, and little trees too!"**

They locked arms—well, man and paw—and skipped in a circle like demented maypole dancers, trailing dried blood and the faint scent of scorched morality.

Passersby froze. A street preacher crossed himself. A pigeon stopped mid-peck and simply walked away.

Bob pointed to the sky.

“Rat!”

Rat raised his paw. “Bob!”

And together they declared:

“We like Chinese!
We like Chinese!
They're polite and discreet,
And they don't make a scene—
Unless you colonize their sea!”

Then they dipped, Broadway-style.

Silence.

A car alarm went off somewhere.

Bob panted. “That was... the most racist musical number I've ever felt good about.”

Rat: “Art heals.”

Rat: “Anyway... is it clear to the public we were referring to Israel and Palestine before?”

Bob took a drag from his cigarette, still catching his breath from the interpretive diplomatic tap dance.

Bob: “Unless they’re morons, they got it.”

Rat: “And if they *are* morons?”

Bob: “Then they probably think the Shangans are a K-pop band and that ‘Brandbands’ is a new TikTok filter.”

Rat: “So… yes.”

Bob: “Yes.”

Bob: “Fuck the Brandbands.”

Rat: (blinks, winces) “Dude? I mean… *agree*, but…”

Bob: “Not all Brandbands. Just fuck *2025* Brandbands bombing and starving the Palestinians—I mean, the *Shangans*.”

Rat: “That’s not just ‘fuck the Brandbands,’ man. It’s… more complicated than that. It’s ‘fuck the

Israeli government’ and all the complex power structures, colonial legacies, military-industrial—look, not all Brandbands back their government, and many protest, and some are exiled, and—”

(Pause. Rat sighs.)

Rat: “I mean… yeah. OK. Fuck the Brandbands.”

Bob: (nods solemnly) “Thank you.”

[INT. BLOOD-SOAKED TORTURE ROOM – DAY]

The man on the table, mangled and previously presumed extremely dead, suddenly croaked:

Man: “I could eat some Mongolian barbecue.”

Bob and the rat froze mid-exit, their shoes (and paws) still sticky with symbolic and literal gore. They turned slowly.

Bob: “…Dude. Weren’t you dead?”

Man (shrugging weakly): “Just in shock.”

There was a long pause.

Bob and Rat looked at each other, eyebrows (and whiskers) raised in shared, existential curiosity.

Both, simultaneously: “Mongolian barbecue *does* sound nice.”

Bob: “I’ll call the restaurant. Hope they take bloodstained walk-ins.”

Man (weakly raising a finger): “Oh, and guys…”

Bob and Rat (turning): “Yes?”

Man: “Fuck the Brandbands.”

Rat (half-scandalized, half-exhausted): “Dude…”

Bob (pointing): “*Told you.*”

Suddenly, from the top of the broken staircase, a voice rang out—nasal, shrill, and self-righteous—

belonging to a **Mockingbird** perched awkwardly on a dangling light fixture.

Mockingbird: “*They mean the Jews!*”

Silence.

Rat: “Oh no. No no no. Shut up, you algorithm-chasing clickbait parrot.”

Bob: “Nobody said that. Nobody even implied that. You *absolute* cretin.”

Man (weakly): “We literally specified the 2025 Israeli government...”

Rat: “Context, nuance, political critique, remember those? Or are you just trained to scream every time someone says ‘Palestine’ in a sentence that isn’t accompanied by fireworks?”

Mockingbird: “*Antisemitism detected!*”

Bob: “Antisemitism my arse. That’s not a detector. That’s a rubber stamp.”

Rat (to Mockingbird): “You are the reason we can’t have complex moral conversations anymore. You fly into the discourse, shit on the table, and fly away screeching ‘holocaust’ at full volume.”

Mockingbird (sniffing): “You’re making me feel unsafe.”

Bob (lighting a cigarette): “You’re a bird.”

Mockingbird: “I identify as trauma.”

Bob (to Rat): “Let’s go eat.”

Man: “With rice?”

Rat: “Obviously. And pickled radish.”

Mockingbird: “*Silencing my voice is violence!*”

Bob: “Get in line, sweetheart. We’re all bleeding.”

They stepped over the Mockingbird, out into the sunlight, whistling *The Internationale* in loose three-part harmony.

Scene ends with a text overlay:

This was a metaphor. If you didn't get it, it's probably about you.

[EXT. RANDOM STREET – DAY]

Bob, now inexplicably dressed like a TV reporter—tan blazer, unkempt hair barely combed, holding a bent microphone with a local news logo suspiciously made of duct tape—stops a passing **Man** on the sidewalk.

Rat, wearing a tiny baseball cap backwards, balances on his hind legs behind a professional-grade camera mounted on a tripod made of spoons and trauma. Strangely, no one questions the rat. Not even once.

Bob (stepping forward): “Excuse me, sir, mind an interview?”

Man (smiling politely): “Sure.”

Bob: “Have you ever been bullied at school?”

Man: “Why… yes. Like everybody, I guess.”

Bob: “Would you like to get back at your bullies? Y’know—some wedgies, maybe a surprise locker slam?”

Man (chuckling): “Okay, that might be fun.”

Bob: “Now imagine all your bullies died. Tragically. Offscreen. Gone.”

Man: “...okay.”

Bob: “And then you moved to another state. Brand new neighborhood. Kids, families, parks, hot dog stands.”

Man: “Right…”

Bob (deadpan): “Would you murder and starve your new neighbors?”

Man (squinting): “...Sir?”

Bob (leaning in): “Just answer.”

Man: “Are you referring to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict?”

Bob (straight-faced): “Not at all. I am referring to the *unilateral genocide* performed by Israel on the Oakestinians.”

Man: “Oh. Well... then no, I suppose.”

Bob: “Thank you for your honesty.”

Rat (off-camera): “Zoom in on the part where he said *no*. We’ll loop it with sad violin music and drone footage.”

Bob: “Back to you, society.”

Rat: “Now for weather: a hot wind of hypocrisy coming in from the West.”

Bob (still holding the mic, turning to Rat, half-whispering into the camera):
"Can we say *fuck the Jews* now?"

Rat (immediately pulling the camera down, eyes wide):

"*Dude*. No. What the hell?"

Bob:

"I mean, we just—"

Rat (interrupting):
"No, no, no. We say *fuck genocide, fuck apartheid, fuck governments that bomb civilians, fuck propaganda, fuck double standards, fuck weaponized victimhood, fuck the UN, fuck the US, fuck history, fuck everyone who sells missiles with one hand and tears with the other.*"

Bob (blinks):
"...but not the Jews?"

Rat:

“Not the Jews.”

Bob (nodding slowly):

“Right. Just clarifying.”

Rat:

“Clarify with nuance, not fire, Bob.”

Bob (to camera):

“Right. You heard it here, folks. Fuck *everything*... except people. People are messy. Some of them are still trying.”

Rat:

“And some of them are rats with cameras.”

They high-five awkwardly. The screen fades to black.

Footnote appears:

*This message was brought to you by
“Basic Decency,” a forgotten virtue
currently out of stock.*

Coins suddenly rain down, clinking loudly against the pavement in a cartoonish cascade. Bob and Rat look up, puzzled.

Then, out of nowhere, a grotesque caricature labeled **"Offensive Stereotype™"** appears beneath the coins, grinning greedily, rubbing hands together in exaggerated anticipation.

Bob and Rat glance at each other nervously.

A giant, flashing neon **"FIIIIIIIIII—"** appears mid-air.

Rat: "Oh no. Ohhh no, no, no—"

A massive weight marked **"10 TONS"** in white chalk crashes down from above, obliterating the caricature instantly, leaving only a flattened silence.

Bob, after a pause: "Well, that took care of itself."

Rat (exhaling relief): "Thank god for cartoon physics and immediate karmic justice."

Bob: "Wanna grab a falafel?"

Rat: "Only if it comes without further hate crimes."

Bob nods thoughtfully: "Fair."

Bob (turns to camera, microphone still in hand):

"Just to be clear, folks: the caricature that got flattened? That was a *stereotype* of a Jew. You know, like the ridiculous ones from propaganda cartoons—always after coins, even loose change."

He waves a hand dismissively.

"Not *actual* Jews. Just the cartoon version. The offensive one. The one that deserves to get crushed by a ten-ton weight in every dimension, metaphorical or otherwise."

Rat (nodding, still adjusting the camera):

"Comic relief, people. Satire. Punching *up*, not *at*."

Bob:

"‘Cause if your takeaway was ‘haha, Jews love money’

instead of ‘haha, that grotesque stereotype got pancaked,’ then maybe the ten-ton weight missed *you*.”

Rat (squeaking for emphasis):
“Get your nuance together, or we’re gonna need more anvils.”

Bob (earnest, cigarette dangling from lips):
“You know, my Jewish friend has this *very* nice Rolex. Real beauty. Belonged to his grandfather.”

Rat (adjusting camera, cautiously curious):
“Is that so?”

Bob (nodding):
“Yeah. Grandpa, on his deathbed… *sold* it to him.”

Rat (freezes, blinks slowly):
“…Dude.”

Bob (shrugs):
“What? True story.”

Rat (drops camera slightly):
“*Dude.*”

Bob:
“*What?* That’s just family business.”

Rat:
“It’s also a sentence that walked into this room and set itself on fire.”

Bob:
“I’m just saying, it’s a tale of legacy… and economic awareness.”

Rat:
“It’s a *tax deduction with tears.*”

Bob (quietly):
“Fifty bucks, he paid. Full retail.”

Rat:
“You need a muzzle and a sensitivity coach.”

“Do they sell those at Rolex?”

Rat sighs audibly.
“Do I *look* like your crisis manager?”

They walk off, arguing about ethical humor and pawn shop etiquette.

Bob turned mid-stride, the dying sun casting noir shadows across the bloodstained sidewalk. He looked at the Rat—his camera operator, his moral compass, his war crimes fact-checker. A pause. A breath.

Then, gently, reverently, he placed his hands on either side of the Rat's tiny head, thumbs brushing the fur just above the jawline.

He leaned in.

Their noses touched. Then mouths. Then full, impassioned, rule-breaking *French*. Tongue and all. It was wrong. It was beautiful. It was rodentally improbable.

When they finally pulled apart, the world was slightly tilted.

Bob (whispering):
“Would you like to come to my place?”

Rat (eyes moist, voice trembling):
“I thought you’d never ask.”

They walked off into the sunset, paw in hand, leaving behind a trail of ruined metaphors, collapsed satire, and a half-eaten falafel.

THE END.

[CURTAIN RISES AGAIN — POST-CREDITS,
POST-FALLOUT, POST-EVERYTHING.]

RAT (stepping downstage, holding his bowler hat solemnly to his chest):
“So... are we antisemitic now?”

[Spotlight sweeps to the AUDIENCE — a motley crowd of philosophers, anarchists, two rabbis

nodding thoughtfully, a Palestinian grandmother crocheting a grenade, and one guy who just wandered in looking for the bathroom.]

AUDIENCE (in perfect chorus):
“No! Never! Yours is priceless satire!”

[Uproarious applause. Dignified weeping. Someone throws a rose made of rolled-up UN reports.]

BOB (bursts through paper backdrop, arms raised, hair wild):
“YES WE ARE!”

[Gasps. Stunned silence. Rat’s pupils dilate.]

RAT (squeaking):
“Bob, what the actual—?!”

BOB (grinning like a lunatic messiah):
“Because *anything* that points a finger at a nation committing atrocities gets called antisemitism! So let’s call it what they call it and march *through* the accusation!”

[Beat. Then — the audience erupts again. Some cheering. Some booing. One man throws hummus. Another throws matzah in confusion. A saxophone starts playing the theme from *Schindler's List* and someone screams, "Too far!" while dancing.]

RAT (deadpan to camera):
"This is why nuance needs bodyguards."

BOB (turns, hand on heart):
"I love the Jewish people. I hate war crimes. If that makes me antisemitic to *somebody*, then their dictionary is broken and on fire."

RAT:
"Fine. But next show, we're doing *Les Misérats*."

BOB (snaps fingers):
"Done. Revolt. Rat revolution. Liberty, equality, tail shampoo."

[CURTAIN DROPS. Someone in the back quietly mutters, “God bless satire,” while crying into a bagel.]

[CURTAIN WHOOSHES BACK UP. BOB steps alone into a single spotlight, holding a nearly empty espresso cup.]

BOB (to the audience, solemnly):
“By the way... I really loathe the Italians.”

[Gasp from someone in the orchestra pit. Accordion music stops mid-note. A meatball rolls offstage.]

RAT (peeking from the wings, horrified):
“Bob! What now?!”

BOB (pacing):
“Yes, the Italians. All that yelling. All that gesturing. Every conversation sounds like a coup d’état conducted by opera singers. Their coffee’s brilliant, their pastries divine, and yet somehow... *I still want to slap them with a wet linguine.*”

RAT (entering, confused):
“Wait, is this racism or jealousy?”

BOB (spinning with theatrical flair):
“*Both!* It’s a hate-crush. Their leather shoes, their effortless style, their terrifying grandmothers who can cook and hex you in the same breath—*they know exactly what they’re doing.*”

[A deeply stylish Italian man in sunglasses shrugs from the front row and yells:
“È vero.” (*It’s true.*)]

RAT (to audience):
“We apologize. Bob’s a recovering Europhile.”

BOB (raising espresso dramatically):
“To the Italians: may your sauce burn, your moped stall, and your bidet spray upward at precisely the wrong moment.”

[He drinks. Music swells. Pasta falls from the ceiling. A Vespa crashes through the backdrop. Applause.]

BOB:

“I loathe them.
But damn it... I *respect* them.”

[Curtain drops one final time, to the thunderous sound of Pavarotti scolding someone in Sicilian.]

[CURTAIN JERKS BACK UP AGAIN, seemingly against its will. BOB stumbles center stage holding a coconut with a tiny umbrella. The RAT rolls in behind him on a skateboard made from flattened flip-flops.]

BOB (raising coconut aloft like a sacrament):
“Fuck Brazilians!”

[Beat. Wind rustles a discarded beach towel. Samba cuts off like a record scratch.]

RAT (removing sunglasses slowly):
 “Bob. We have *talked* about this.”

BOB (dead serious):
“They invented a dance that looks like fighting. Or a

fight that looks like dancing. I don't know, and I hate that."

RAT:

"That's *capoeira*. It's an art form. A *cultural expression*."

BOB (pointing at the audience):

"An expression that once roundhouse-kicked me while smiling!"

RAT

(sighing):

"Look, what did Brazil ever do to you?"

BOB:

"They made flip-flops a national identity. They gave the world a rainforest just to burn it. And they put condensed milk in *everything*."

RAT:

"Okay, that last part is legit. But *fuck* them?"

BOB (calmer, sipping coconut):
“Alright. Not *fuck* Brazilians. Just... *mildly menace* them. Like with an angry postcard.”

[From the audience, a Brazilian woman in Carnival feathers stands up and shouts:]
“Vai tomar no cu, gringo!”

BOB (bowing):
“Exactly that, my dear. Whatever you just said, but back at you—with love and post-colonial trauma.”

RAT:
“I think she invited you to... experience something.”

BOB:
“Let’s hope it’s not capoeira.”

[Curtain drops. A single mango rolls across the stage. Somewhere, Bossa Nova plays faintly and sarcastically.]

[BLACKOUT. Silence. Then—sudden harsh spotlight. BOB stands alone, hair askew, shirt half-buttoned, holding a soggy samosa.]

BOB (looking directly into the void):
“Fuck Bangladesh.”

[Dead silence. Even the rat doesn’t roll in. A monsoon of awkwardness begins to gather.]

BOB (shrugs):
“I mean, just look at it. Ninety-nine million people, zero personal space, and somehow every alley has *three* cricket games happening *at once*.”

[RAT finally peeks in, clearly distressed, holding a miniature Bangladeshi flag.]

RAT:
“Bob, I swear to every river in the Ganges delta, don’t start this.”

BOB:

“They’ve got like forty seasons in a day. It’s either flooding or melting. No in-between.”

RAT (desperately):

“They gave the world Tagore. They gave the world Riz Ahmed—”

BOB (interrupting):

“*British*. But fine.”

RAT (fuming):

“They have textile workers who build half your closet for the cost of your *toothbrush!*”

BOB (nods):

“Exactly. The global supply chain’s emotional hostage negotiator. I hate them because I *depend* on them.”

RAT (flatly):

“So it’s not xenophobia. It’s just projection.”

BOB (points with a curry-stained finger):
“Now you’re getting it.”

[A Bangladeshi grandmother appears in the front row, throws a slipper at Bob with unerring precision, then vanishes.]

BOB (rubbing his head):
“Yep. That tracks.”

RAT (to the audience):
“Please send your complaints to:
Bob, Care of Cognitive Dissonance Avenue, Satire District, Postcode LOL.”

[Curtain drops. The lights flicker. Somewhere, a boat sinks under a monsoon, and Bob quietly Googles "Dhaka apology gift baskets."]

[CURTAIN RISES with dramatic accordion music. A croissant explodes offstage. BOB storms in wearing a beret and a sneer.]

BOB (arms wide, spitting syllables):
“FUCK. THE. FRENCH.”

[The REST OF THE WORLD bursts from every wing, balcony, fire exit, airport lounge, and philosophical café table in a perfectly synchronized stadium roar:]

REST OF THE WORLD:
“YYYYYYEEEEEEAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!”

[Fireworks shaped like baguettes. Champagne corks launch into orbit. Someone punches a mime.]

RAT (sliding in on a unicycle, wearing a striped shirt):
“Wait, hold on—*why* this time?”

BOB:
“Because they *sigh at you* in five different registers before they even *look* at your passport. Because they call your language ‘ugly’ with an accent that sounds like a goose reading poetry underwater!”

RAT

(nodding):

“Because they invented 37 different cheeses just to insult lactose-intolerant people.”

BOB:

“Because they colonized half the planet and then act offended when *you* ask for directions!”

REST OF THE WORLD (in glorious chorus):

“Because they call fries Belgian and then claim them anyway!”

**[Scene breaks into wild celebratory dance. A German breakdances on a smoking Renault. A British punk pours tea into the Seine. An American shoots a rifle into the air for no discernible reason.]*

BOB

(suddenly

solemn):

“But… their films are beautiful. Their bread is divine. And they once overthrew a monarchy with zero spreadsheets.”

RAT:

“...So?”

BOB

(grinning):

“Still fuck ’em.”

[EXPLOSION OF CONFETTI. Accordion solo turns into death metal. Everyone smokes a cigarette, even the children. Curtain drops like the Bastille.]

THE END.

[CURTAIN RISES hesitantly over a dusty, dimly lit map room. A large spinning globe creaks ominously. BOB stands center stage, holding a tattered flag and a cocktail with a tiny plastic palm tree.]

BOB (looking around, puzzled, then slowly to audience):

“Fuck Equatorial Guinea.”

[Silence. A long, confusing silence. Even the RAT hesitates before entering stage left with a stack of encyclopedias and a GPS device.]

RAT (blinking):

“Wait… why? Like… *why* specifically Equatorial Guinea?”

BOB (shrugs):

“I don’t know. The name sounds made up. *Equatorial Guinea?* It’s like ‘Generic Hot Africa’ on a Risk board.”

RAT:

“Dude, they’ve got oil, a dictatorship, and like 17 internet cafes total. They’re barely surviving their own government.”

BOB (nodding):

“Exactly. They *suffered* their way to page 2 of a Google search. *Page 2*, Rat. That’s where shame goes to die.”

RAT (sighs):

“This isn’t satire anymore, it’s geographical slander.”

BOB (pointing at globe):

“Tell me one fun fact about Equatorial Guinea.”

RAT (after long pause):

...They speak Spanish?

BOB:

“Ha! Got ‘em.”

[Suddenly, a single Equatoguinean man appears in the back row of the theatre, raises one eyebrow, and quietly mutters:]

“*Bruh.*”

BOB (suddenly defensive):

“Look, nothing personal! I’m on a global streak. Everyone gets a turn.”

RAT:

“Even *Liechtenstein*?”

BOB:

“Especially Liechtenstein.”

**[Spotlight fades. A small, weary Equatorial Guinea flag slowly lowers from the rafters like a confused ghost.]*

RAT (to audience):
“He doesn’t even know where it is.”

BOB (muttering):
“Somewhere near Upsettingland.”

[CURTAIN FALLS before an ambassador arrives.]

[CURTAIN SNAPS UP – backdrop of a spinning globe that’s had enough. Bob stands center stage, sleeves rolled up, wielding a dart like a prophet with a grudge.]

BOB (pointing dramatically):
“Fuck Myanmar!”

**[Drumroll. Awkward pause. Somewhere, a monk drops his alms bowl.]*

RAT (rolling in on a wheeled atlas, exasperated):

“Dude. You’re just *Montecarlo shooting* now.”

BOB

(shrugging):

“What’s that?”

RAT:

“You’re just firing random hate at countries you can *barely pronounce* hoping something sticks. It’s geopolitical roulette with no safety.”

BOB:

“Well, Myanmar *did* have a coup. And civil war. And mass atrocities.”

RAT:

“Yes, and *you* just accused a rainforest of ghosting you on Tinder last week. There is *no strategy anymore*. You’ve become a one-man United Nations tantrum.”

BOB

(folding

arms):

“You’re saying I should stop calling out war crimes?”

RAT:

“No, I’m saying stop spinning the globe, yelling ‘fuck that one,’ and calling it foreign policy.”

[Bob thinks. Spins globe anyway. Stops on Iceland.]

BOB

(whispers):

“Fuck their peaceful literacy rates.”

RAT

(deadpan):

“Iceland's gonna send a poet to stab you with a metaphor.”

[CURTAIN FALLS while Bob mumbles something about fish and democracy. Somewhere, a UN intern screams into a pillow.]

[CURTAIN RISES – backdrop is a jagged slice of the Italian coastline, impossibly beautiful and thoroughly judgmental. A seagull screeches in Ligurian dialect. Bob storms in, holding a half-eaten focaccia and a parking ticket. Rat follows, wearing sunglasses and a grudge.]

BOB (furious):
“Fuck the region of Liguria in Italy.”

RAT (immediately, with fire):
“Oh *absolutely*. This I support. *Fuck them*.”

BOB (pointing at the sea):
“Too narrow. Too smug. That coastline looks like it was designed by someone trying to *spite pedestrians*.”

RAT:
“You walk half a kilometer and it’s uphill, downhill, and emotionally manipulative.”

BOB:
“Their pesto is *good*, which makes it worse because they *know* it’s good. And they lord it over you like they invented both basil and smugness.”

RAT (shaking tiny fist):
“They hate tourists, they hate other Italians, they hate *themselves*—but politely. In dialect.”

BOB:

“Genoa? Genoa is like a haunted museum of maritime pettiness!”

RAT:

“Cinque Terre? More like *Cinque Terror* for your knees.”

[A Ligurian man in linen appears on a nearby balcony, shrugs and mutters, “È vero,” before slamming his shutters with artisan contempt.]

BOB:

“Their towns are stacked like a Jenga tower made of pastel houses and *passive aggression*.”

RAT:

“Parking’s impossible, the old ladies stare into your soul, and the anchovies *aren’t optional*.”

BOB (screaming into the sea):

“FUCK. LIGURIA.”

RAT:

“FROM THE ALPS TO THE COAST.”

[They link arms and march offstage, slipping on olive oil. A chorus of judgmental nonnas tsks in A minor.]

THE END.

[CURTAIN CREAKS OPEN — backdrop of Balkan mountains, dramatic and slightly smoking. Accordion music starts, then immediately breaks into a fight with itself. BOB stands at center stage, surrounded by a map of shifting borders, disputed territories, and at least six different flags all arguing in the corner.]

BOB (hands in pockets, staring at the audience with that specific Balkan fatigue):
“Fuck former Yugoslavia. *All of it.*”

[The air tenses. Even the stage lights flicker uncertainly, unsure which side to pick.]

RAT (emerging slowly from behind a stack of shelved grievances):

“...Bob. Are you trying to restart a war?”

BOB:

“No. I’m just saying—if your region has had more flags than functioning train lines in the last thirty years, maybe it’s time to take a breath.”

RAT:

“You just insulted Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Montenegro, North Macedonia *and* Kosovo. All at once.”

BOB (nodding proudly):

“That’s called *efficiency*.”

[Suddenly, seven actors appear, each representing one former republic. All begin shouting in overlapping languages about blood, borders, football, and whose grandmother’s recipe actually defines “real” sarma.]

RAT (covering ears):
“You summoned the *Council of Nationalistic Kitchenware!*”

BOB (yelling over them):
“You all have the same soup and hate each other over whose spoon stirs it!”

[A Montenegrin actor shrugs and lights a cigarette. A Croatian slaps it out of his hand. A Bosnian pulls out a trumpet and begins playing *something both beautiful and threatening.*]

RAT (hissing):
“Say something diplomatic before this becomes the 1990s again!”

BOB (turning to the crowd, raising his hands):
“Look, I don’t hate the people. I hate the *grudges*. I hate the ghosts. I hate that every stone has a memory with blood on it and nobody’s allowed to forget or forgive.”

[The shouting dies down. One actor wipes a tear. Another offers him rakija. A third stabs a flag into it, but lovingly.]

RAT (softly):
“That was almost poetic.”

BOB:
“I try. Still though—fuck the whole region. But like... in a hug-it-out, emotionally honest way.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as they all eat burek together and suspiciously side-eye each other’s versions.]

THE END. (For now.)

[CURTAIN RISES AGAIN — same Balkan backdrop, only now darker, stormier, with the faint sound of a distant accordion crying in a minor key. BOB steps forward, shirt untucked, cigarette burning too fast, eyes tired but unrepentant.]

BOB (flatly, firmly):
“No. Sincerely—fuck *all* of them.”

[Silence. Heavy. The kind that follows funerals or failed peace talks. RAT slowly emerges from the side, holding a steaming cup of thick coffee no one ever asked for.]

RAT (quietly):
“Bob...”

BOB:

“The Serbs, the Croats, the Bosniaks, the Montenegrins, the Slovenes, the Macedonians—yes, I said *Macedonians*, fight me—Kosovars, Albanians in Pristina, Serbs in North Mitrovica, *every* guy with a mustache and a grudge and a cousin he still hates from ‘92.”

[The lights dim slightly, as if the theatre itself is nervously checking for landmines.]

BOB (gaining steam):
“Every border that moved an inch and left ten thousand graves behind. Every flag waved by a kid who doesn’t know why his dad still screams in his

sleep. Every aunt who says ‘we don’t talk about *that* side of the family.’”

RAT (softly):
“That’s a lot of trauma to hate.”

BOB:
“It’s not the *people*. It’s what they’ve become. National identity ossified into football chants and bullet holes. Nostalgia weaponized. ‘Victimhood Olympics’ with sniper fire.”

**[A single balding man in the audience shouts “ŽIVJELA JUGOSLAVIJA!” and is immediately shushed by six others calling him a traitor.]*

BOB (spitting it out):
“Sincerely. *Fuck all of them*. For never healing. For never learning. For raising statues instead of kids.”

[Pause. He takes a drag. Exhales.]

BOB (quieter):
“And if any of them say, ‘You don’t understand’—

you're right. I *don't*. But you don't either. You're just repeating."

RAT (watching him):
"That'll get you stabbed in Mostar."

BOB (shrugs):
"I'll take the bridge down with me."

[CURTAIN FALLS. Somewhere, an old war monument blinks once and goes back to rusting.]

[CURTAIN RISES one final time — a sterile, overdesigned minimalist stage. White walls. Gentle plinking of a koto. A bonsai tree quietly judges you from stage left. BOB storms in, furious, holding a vending machine fish cake and a JR Rail Pass folded like origami failure.]

BOB (declaring to the void):
"Fuck Japan!"

[A silence so sharp it cuts sushi. The bonsai seems offended.]

RAT (entering, dressed like a Studio Ghibli sidekick):

“...Bob. Are we doing this?”

BOB (furious):

“Oh, we’re *doing* this. I’ve been polite. I’ve bowed. I’ve removed my shoes. I’ve accepted vending machine squid as lunch. But this—this island of quiet judgment and perfectly organized social anxiety—*has tested me.*”

RAT:

“You’re mad because the train was too punctual again, aren’t you?”

BOB:

“IT *LEFT* TWELVE SECONDS EARLY.”

RAT:

“That’s not a scandal, that’s a national apology followed by group seppuku.”

BOB

(pacing):

“They invented the bullet train, the Walkman, and emotional repression as a service industry. They gave us anime, but also *endless filler arcs*. Their food is so beautiful I’m afraid to eat it. Their toilets know more about me than my therapist.”

RAT:

“They also haven’t reckoned with their war crimes, Bob.”

BOB:

“I *know!* You try to bring up Nanking and suddenly it’s *polite cough and tea ceremony!* I can’t handle this level of cultural amnesia wrapped in cherry blossoms!”

[A Shinto priest ghost floats by and gently mutters “shoganai” before vanishing into a vending machine that dispenses only disappointment and Yakult.]

BOB

(pointing to sky):

“Fuck Japan. For its brilliance. For its denial. For its

beauty. For its isolation. For its unstoppable march toward aesthetic extinction.”

RAT:

“You hate them because you *admire* them.”

BOB (cracking open a cold Pocari Sweat):

“Yes. Like all my enemies.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as a robotic dog bows and plays a melancholy chime from *Final Fantasy VII*. A subtitle appears:]

*This performance is banned in Osaka,
awkwardly tolerated in Kyoto, and
optioned for adaptation in Netflix
Korea.*

[CURTAIN RISES on a golden, melancholy Lisbon sunset. Fado music weeps gently in the background. A tram groans uphill for the seventeenth time that day. Ropes of drying cod sway like funeral bunting.

RAT steps forward, arms behind back, sniffing the Atlantic wind suspiciously.]

RAT (with venom):
“Fuck Portugal.”

[Gasp. A single tile cracks in Alfama. A pastel de nata drops in slow motion.]

BOB (offstage, horrified):
“*Whoa*. That’s uncalled for.”

RAT (gritting tiny teeth):
“No it’s *not*. They colonized half the world, then spent the next four centuries sulking about it on acoustic guitar.”

[BOB rolls in on a shopping cart full of wine bottles labeled *Regret Reserve*.]

BOB:
“They gave us melancholic seafood poetry, Rat. Show some respect.”

RAT (spitting):

“They gave us melancholy, full stop. You ever seen a country so nostalgic it cries over things it never apologized for?”

BOB:

“They invented fado. It’s what sadness *wishes* it could be.”

RAT:

“They also invented saudade, the national feeling of missing something *vaguely imperial*.”

BOB (pointing with a corkscrew):

“They were the first global empire!”

RAT:

“And the first to collapse while still insisting the language was the legacy.”

[A sleepy man in Porto pokes his head out of a window and mutters, “Sim, mas temos vinho,” then closes the shutters with aristocratic despair.]

RAT (furious):

“Your country is a cobblestone guilt trip covered in sardines!”

BOB:

“That sounds... delightful, honestly.”

RAT (hissing):

“They serve rice with *everything*. Even rice.”

**[BOB clutches his chest, wounded.]*

RAT (composed again):

“Fuck Portugal. But like... respectfully. With wine. And maybe a nap after.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as someone whispers *obrigado* from behind a lace curtain and an accordion sighs in agreement.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a single street lamp flickers over a weathered cobblestone street. The sign reads *Rua Andrade Neves, Pelotas, RS, Brazil*. A dog barks in the distance. Somewhere, someone is overcooking

rice. RAT stands center stage, pointing with fury at one side of the street.]

RAT (spitting venom with precision):
“Fuck the *odd-numbered* side of Rua Andrade Neves.
Pelotas. Rio Grande do Sul. Brazil.”

[Thunderclap. A man on a bicycle swerves and crashes gently into a sack of beans. A widow closes her window just slightly.]

BOB (stepping in slowly, sipping chimarrão, brows raised):
“...That’s poetically specific.”

RAT (fuming):
“They know what they did.”

BOB:
“What did they do?”

RAT (dead serious):
“Uneven sidewalks. Satellite dishes pointed straight

into hell. A shoe store that *judged me*. And a *grandmother* who told me my tail looked ‘triste.’”

BOB (gasping):
“She called your tail *sad*?”

RAT:
“And then offered me feijoada with raisins in it.”

BOB (whispering):
“She *wanted you to suffer*.”

RAT (pacing now):
“The even-numbered side? Lovely. Calm. A kiosk that sells guaraná and reason. But that *odd* side? It's where hope goes to limp.”

BOB (sighs):
“Everything in Pelotas is slightly damp. Including vengeance.”

[A cat crosses the stage from odd to even. Stops. Looks back. Regrets nothing.]

RAT:

“Fuck number 173. Fuck 211. Fuck that weird bar with the Jesus statue that watches you pee.”

BOB

(mournfully):

“And yet... this feels like home.”

[CURTAIN FALLS. A distant voice calls “moço!” but no one answers. Fade to drizzle.]

[CURTAIN RISES to a vast, empty desert. Orange dunes stretch forever. A lone wind stirs sand and colonial regret. BOB stands atop a rock shaped vaguely like a German helmet, arms crossed, hair blown heroically sideways. RAT stands beside him, wearing SPF 9000 and sunglasses that reflect history badly handled.]

BOB (quietly, with gravitas):
“*Delenda Namibia.*”

[Thunder rumbles in the distance, though the sky is perfectly clear.]

RAT (tilting head):
“...You quoting Cato now?”

BOB (stone-faced):
“Yes. Except instead of *Carthago delenda est*, it’s
Namibia. Because I *fucking had it*.”

RAT (softly):
“Do you... wanna explain?”

BOB (arms flailing):
“They made a genocide *before* it was trendy. They let
the Germans experiment with desert ethnic
cleansing and *still* kept a straight face for their
independence tour!”

RAT:
“The Herero and Nama massacres. 1904. Bob read
one Wikipedia page and now he’s full Livy.”

BOB (booming now):
“They have a coastline called the *Skeleton Coast*.
Skeleton! And not for fun pirate reasons. For

shipwrecks and dried whales and metaphors for failed infrastructure."

RAT:

"You tried to rent a car there once, didn't you?"

BOB:

"I spent three days in a gravel pit listening to a man named *Stefanus* explain why the road wasn't *real*."

RAT:

"Was the view nice?"

BOB

(snapping):

"TOO nice. It made me feel guilty for wanting to leave. Like the country *negged* me into silence."

RAT

(nodding):

"Yeah. That tracks."

BOB (quietly again, with intense spite):

"*Delenda Namibia*. But respectfully. Through cultural exchange. Possibly over goat stew."

RAT (scribbling in a notebook):
“Add them to the list: ‘Places we threaten with Latin
but secretly admire.’”

[CURTAIN FALLS as a sandstorm slowly erases
colonial borders, and a jackal laughs somewhere near
Swakopmund.]

[CURTAIN RISES – a windswept Mediterranean
stage, dry lightning crackling over a backdrop
painted with olive trees and flaming triremes. BOB
stands in a tattered Roman toga, sandals dusty, gaze
fixed westward. RAT lounges nearby on a broken
amphora, sipping wine from a bottle shaped like
Cicero’s disapproval.]

BOB (thunder in his voice):
“Since I’m at it—*Delenda Carthago*.”

RAT (without looking up):
“Dude… you’re a *couple of millennia* late for that.
The Romans *already* burned it to ash and salted the
earth.”

BOB (not flinching):

“I said what I said.”

RAT (sighs, setting wine down):

“You realize there’s no Carthage left, right? Just some ruins, a gift shop, and a plaque saying ‘Sorry about the annihilation.’”

BOB:

“Doesn’t matter. I still hate it. I hate it *retroactively*. I hate it in *principle*.”

RAT:

“What did Carthage ever do to *you*?”

BOB (seething):

“They dared to exist at the same time as Rome. And they had elephants. *Elephants!* On boats! That’s smug.”

RAT:

“They lost, Bob.”

BOB:

“Not fast enough.”

[The ghost of Cato the Elder passes through, whispering “*delenda est*” before tripping over a CGI elephant skeleton and fading back into Latin.]

RAT:

“So you’re declaring war on *dust*.”

BOB:

“Yes. On dust. And memory. And salty vengeance.”

RAT (raising glass):

“To historical overkill, then.”

BOB (to the heavens):

“*Delenda Carthago!* Also, screw Hannibal. Too dramatic.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as a spectral Punic merchant yells “we were just vibing!” and disappears into a salt breeze.]

[CURTAIN RISES – the Forum Romanum, crumbling and majestic, with scaffolding because even ruins need renovation. The sky is heavy with toga-related tension. BOB stands on a marble pedestal, finger raised in righteous fury. RAT wears a tiny laurel crown and looks deeply unamused.]

BOB (thundering like a caffeinated Cicero):
“*Quo usque tandem, Catilina, abutere patientia nostra?*”

RAT (groaning):
“Oh *fuck*, we’re going full *ancient Roman* now…”

BOB (not missing a beat):
“*Tace, mus!*”

[RAT pauses, stunned, processing the sudden downgrade from co-star to vermin.]

RAT (blinking):
“Did you just call me a *mouse*?”

BOB (still booming):

“You dare interrupt the defense of the Republic with your insolent twitching?”

RAT:

“I’m a *rat*, Bob. A *rat*. We’re smarter, we form complex urban societies, and we don’t blindly follow demagogues in sandals yelling in dactylic hexameter.”

BOB (grandly):

“You are *not* Rome.”

RAT:

“No. I’m the one who remembers what Rome actually did to people who *weren’t* Rome.”

BOB:

“You’re starting to sound like a Gaul.”

RAT:

“You’re starting to sound like *Mussolini with a thesaurus*.”

[A bust of Cicero slowly turns to face the audience and sighs with historical exhaustion.]

BOB (still declaiming to a Senate that doesn't exist):
"Catilina is among us! Hiding in the shadows!
Plotting sedition!"

RAT (deadpan):
"You mean the guy selling knockoff spolia behind the
Pantheon?"

BOB:
"HE IS A THREAT TO THE REPUBLIC."

RAT:
"Bob, the Republic *fell*. Two thousand years ago.
You're yelling into a UNESCO site."

BOB (suddenly quieter):
"...It was a really *good* opening line though."

RAT (nods):
"Yeah. It slaps."

[CURTAIN FALLS as an old Roman senator ghostly claps from the vomitorium, muttering “bravo” and disappearing into a scroll.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a moonlit atrium. Marble columns gleam like teeth. Somewhere, a fountain trickles with suspicious sensuality. BOB stands center stage, cloaked in philosophical yearning and mild inebriation. In his hands, cupped with absurd reverence, is RAT — confused but too emotionally invested to flee.]

BOB (softly, a whisper to Venus herself):
*"Da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum."*

[He pauses, eyes closing as if inhaling eternity itself. Then opens them again, staring directly at the rat's glistening eyes.]

BOB (dramatic sigh):

*“Then we’ll lose count, my little mus,
so no evil eye may curse us with envy.”*

RAT (visibly flushed under the fur):

“Are… are you *quoting Catullus* at me?”

BOB:

“I’m *invoking* Catullus. At *us*.”

RAT:

“I mean, I’m flattered, but you do remember he ended up bitter and obsessive over a woman named Lesbia?”

BOB:

“I’m already bitter. I just upgraded you from disease vector to muse.”

[A breeze blows through the portico. Somewhere, a lyre is plucked by a ghostly undergraduate majoring in unrequited love.]

RAT (tiny voice, overcome):
“...Okay. But I get the top bunk tonight.”

BOB:

“Fine. But I get to recite Horace during.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as they kiss—awkward, whiskered, timeless. Latin echoes in the marble:
Vivamus, mea mus, atque amemus.]

[CURTAIN RISES – darker now. The atrium remains, but the marble has cracks. The moonlight cuts sharper. Wine goblets sit half-drained. BOB stands dazed, lips still tingling from stolen Latin kisses. RAT slinks back into the scene, tail twitching, delivering lines like venom wrapped in velvet.]

RAT (cold and lyrical):
“Forget that Lesbia, Bob.
Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa.
Illa Lesbia, quam Catullus unam
plus quam se atque suos amavit omnes...”

[He circles Bob like a satirical panther in a toga.]

RAT (leaning in):
“*Nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis
glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes.*”

[A long silence. Bob looks like someone who just saw his favorite painting defaced with graffiti that’s also… technically correct.]

BOB (swallowing):
“…So… Lesbia’s out there giving blowjobs to the grandsons of Romulus in alleyways now?”

RAT:
“That’s what he said.”

BOB:
“Catullus really needed therapy.”

RAT:
“No. He needed to *move on*. Instead, he wrote poems like revenge notes stapled to his own heart.”

BOB:

“Honestly? Respect.”

RAT

(softly):

“You wanna get wine drunk and write about how nobody gets us either?”

BOB:

“I already started.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as the two descend into candlelit pettiness, scribbling odes to imaginary betrayals and licking olive oil off clay plates. Latin, after all, is the language of passion, pettiness, and historically accurate slut-shaming.]

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[CURTAIN RISES – the Senate floor. All the other senators have mysteriously vanished. Two figures remain: BOB, leaning on a marble plinth with theatrical exhaustion, and RAT, sprawled across a ceremonial scroll like it's a beach towel.]

BOB (with measured gravitas):
"Nonnulli iudicium veriti profugerunt."

[He lets it hang there like Cicero dropping a mic. A silence worthy of an assassination follows.]

RAT (snorting, arms behind his head):
"Pffft. *Cowards.*"

BOB (arching an eyebrow):
"They feared judgment."

RAT:
"They feared *homework*. The Republic was dying and they fled like it was a bad dinner party."

BOB:

“Or like they’d loaned Catiline money and knew what was coming.”

RAT

(laughs):

“Half of Rome was two bad investments away from stabbing each other.”

BOB

(musing):

“Do you think Cato ever cried?”

RAT:

“Only when sober.”

[A togaed janitor sweeps past, muttering in ancient Umbrian about “entitled patricians and their dramatic exits.”]

BOB (gazing toward the absent senators):

“History remembers the bold.”

RAT:

“And history is written by whoever survives the stabbing. Preferably with a pithy quote.”

BOB (raising a goblet):

“To the cowards who fled!”

RAT (raising his tail like a saber):

“May their names be forgotten... but their wine cellars remembered!”

[CURTAIN FALLS to applause from an invisible jury of toga-clad ghosts.]

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[CURTAIN FALLS to applause from an invisible jury of toga-clad ghosts.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a windswept rural outpost, the edge of the Empire. A single olive tree leans against the wind. A weathered milestone reads *MCCXXII miles ab Urbe Condita*. BOB sits on a rough stone bench, cloak wrapped tight, gazing toward a city he'll

never return to. RAT perches beside him, munching a date pit like a philosopher chewing through time.]

BOB (quiet, firm):
"Malle se hic primum quam Romae secundum esse."

RAT (nods slowly):
"Wise words."

[They both stare out across the desert. Somewhere, an eagle cries over a forgotten garrison.]

BOB:
"Better to be first in the mud than second in the marble."

RAT:
"Better to rule over goats and silence than beg senators for scraps."

BOB:
"Better to have your own table than lick plates in the Forum."

RAT (raises tail like a toast):

“To all who’d rather freeze free than sweat servile.”

BOB (nodding):

“To the provinces. To obscurity. To dignity.”

RAT:

“And to the bastards in Rome—may their wine turn to vinegar and their marble seats crack beneath them.”

[CURTAIN FALLS slowly, as two shadows remain on the frontier — small, resolute, and absolutely unconcerned with any laurel-wreathed approval.]

[CURTAIN RISES — dim lighting, Gregorian chant echoing faintly. A stone-walled monastery corridor, candlelit. BOB kneels solemnly, hands raised to heaven.]

BOB (intoning):

"Exurge Domine, et judica causam tuam..."

(Rise up, O Lord, and judge Your cause...)

RAT (dryly, half-asleep on a nearby pew):
“I didn’t expect a kind of Spanish Inquisition.”

[JARRING CHORD]

[DOOR EXPLODES OPEN]

[CARDINAL XIMINEZ (Michael Palin) BURSTS
IN, flanked by CARDINAL BIGGLES and
CARDINAL FANG]

XIMINEZ (shouting):
“NOBODY expects the Spanish Inquisition! Our
chief weapon is surprise—surprise and fear—fear
and surprise... Our *two* weapons are fear, surprise,
and ruthless efficiency—”

BIGGLES (whispering):
“Don’t forget the Pope.”

XIMINEZ:
“Yes! Our *three* weapons are fear, surprise, ruthless
efficiency, and an *almost fanatical devotion to the
Pope—*”

[He pauses, visibly recalculating.]

XIMINEZ (wincing):

“Our *four*—no—*amongst* our weapons… Amongst our weaponry… are such diverse elements as: fear, surprise, ruthless efficiency, an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope, and nice red uniforms—”

FANG (muttering):

“…And comfy chairs.”

XIMINEZ (snapping fingers):

“I’ll come in again.”

[THE INQUISITION EXITS with the solemnity of a Monty Python sketch trying not to trip over its own robes.]

RAT (leaning over to Bob, deadpan):

“You just had to quote a Latin psalm, didn’t you?”

BOB (shrugs):

“I thought it’d summon divine justice, not *Pope cosplay and improv panic*.”

[CURTAIN FALLS to the sound of faint trumpet fanfare, followed by someone yelling “Fetch the soft cushions!”]

[CURTAIN RISES — a decadent salon in pre-revolutionary Paris. Velvet curtains. Gilded mirrors. A chandelier teetering with irony. BOB reclines in an absurdly ornate armchair, swirling a glass of wine the color of overdue blood. RAT stands nearby in a powdered wig, holding a tiny fan and an enormous grudge.]

BOB (lazily, like he invented ennui):
“Après moi, le déluge.”

RAT (snaps fan shut, exasperated):
“Oh for fuck’s sake, Bob.”

BOB (dreamily):
“It’s elegant. It’s fatalistic. It’s French.”

RAT:
“It’s selfish, short-sighted, and historically credited

to a man who wore high heels and bankrupted a continent while powdering his dog's butt."

BOB:

"Exactly. Mood."

RAT

(paces):

"You realize that phrase *basically* says, 'I don't care what disaster follows, as long as it's not during brunch.'"

BOB:

"Correct. I say it every time I file my taxes."

RAT:

"You *don't* file your taxes."

BOB:

"...Après moi, the audit."

RAT (facepalms with his tiny paw):

"This is why empires fall."

BOB:

“Yes, but they fall with panache.”

[A loaf of stale brioche falls from the ceiling. A harpsichord plays itself into revolution.]

BOB (to audience):

“If I can’t have Versailles, *let them eat metaphor.*”

[CURTAIN FALLS as thunder rolls in, and somewhere outside, a guillotine blade is being sharpened to a snappy 3/4 rhythm.]

[CURTAIN RISES — opulence turned up to eleven. Chandeliers glitter. The air smells of butter and rebellion. WAITERS in powdered wigs and fishnet stockings glide through the aisles, trays piled absurdly high with croissants, pain au chocolat, and deeply confused brioches. The audience helps themselves, unsure if they’re complicit or just hungry.]

[BOB stands at the edge of the stage, arms open, drunk on power and maybe actual wine. RAT lounges on a golden footstool beside him, covered in crumbs.]

BOB (grinning like a guillotined ghost):
“*Qu’ils mangent de la brioche.*”

[A beat. Silence. Audience slowly chews.]

RAT (mouth full):
“You realize she probably never actually said that, right?”

BOB:
“Doesn’t matter. It’s theatrical. And they’re eating it.”

RAT:
“They’re eating *croissants*, Bob. *Brioche* is the smug cousin that thinks it’s above laminated dough.”

BOB:
“It’s metaphorical.”

RAT:

“It’s misattributed, misquoted, and misused. But damn, it’s tasty.”

[A child from the third row yells “Vive la Révolution!” while dual-wielding buttered croissants. A cello plays a threatening pizzicato.]

BOB (winking at the child):
“That’s the spirit. Start them early. The Republic needs crumbs of resistance.”

[A waiter offers BOB a tray. He picks the flakiest, most photogenic croissant, holds it aloft like Hamlet with a skull.]

BOB:

“To monarchy, decadence, and baked goods too rich to survive a fiscal collapse!”

[CURTAIN FALLS as the audience erupts into applause, revolution, and moderate gluten intolerance.]

[CURTAIN RISES — an empty Roman road stretching into moonlight. In the distance, an ancient signpost creaks. A Vespa is abandoned by a broken aqueduct. BOB stands center stage in a trench coat that smells like espresso and poor decisions. RAT, disheveled and vaguely Renaissance-plague-doctor chic, is dragging a tiny suitcase filled with regrets.]

BOB (cool as a Fellini fever dream):
“Quo vadis, baby?”

RAT (sighs, staring into the middle distance like a rodent Camus):
“I should’ve listened to my mother. And spread the plague like cousin Nathan.”

BOB:
“Cousin Nathan? The one who turned the Adriatic into a mass grave with just a flea and ambition?”

RAT:
“That’s the one. Promoted to Myth by 1348.”

BOB:

“And now you’re here. With me. Asking directions in Latin while wearing a metaphor.”

RAT:

“Because I took a left turn at Jerusalem and ended up in a stage play written by an existentially constipated Kafka impersonator.”

BOB (lighting a cigarette made of disappointment):

“Where *are* we going, Rat?”

RAT:

“Same place as always, Bob.”

BOB

(smirks):

“Oblivion?”

RAT:

“No. A breakfast place that still serves past noon.”

[A light breeze carries a single leaf across the stage, as if God Himself is trying to shrug. A choir of faintly sarcastic monks hums a dissonant amen.]

BOB:

“Quo vadis, baby…”

RAT:

“Anywhere with pancakes and no moral clarity.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as they walk off into uncertain brunch.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a bleak lecture hall floating in a void. The chalkboard is infinite. The lights flicker like forgotten epiphanies. BOB stands at the podium, not teaching but pronouncing. RAT is halfway up the back row, wrapped in a cardigan, eating grapes one at a time.]

BOB (solemn, reverent, as if caressing the abyss):

"Haben wir heute eine Antwort auf die Frage nach dem, was wir mit dem Wort »seiend« eigentlich meinen?"

Keineswegs.*"

[Silence. The air folds in on itself slightly.]

RAT (after a pause, voice echoing like a dream half-remembered):

“What if I grew orchids?”

[Another pause. Somewhere, a copy of *Being and Time* bursts into flames, then apologizes in German.]

BOB (unfazed):

“Dasein is not a horticultural preference.”

RAT:

“But orchids are temporal. Fragile. Ephemeral. They bloom, they fade, they… *are*.”

BOB (stroking chin):

“So you propose *Sein-zum-Blumen*?”

RAT:

“I propose not listening to Heidegger while sober.”

BOB:

“Too late.”

[A petal falls onto the podium. Time pauses, nods approvingly, then resumes.]

RAT:

“Do you think Heidegger ever got laid?”

BOB:

“Only linguistically.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as the void claps politely and a lone orchid blossoms out of pure ontology.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a windswept bench at the edge of the known world. Stars hang low, like regrets you can still reach. The night is cold but not cruel. BOB unscrews a battered bottle of brandy, drinks deeply, then passes it to RAT. They sit in silence like old war poets who survived the metaphor but not the meaning.]

BOB (softly, a prayer with alcohol on its breath):

"Gebe Gott uns allen, uns Trinkern, einen so leichten und so schönen Tod."

[RAT takes the bottle without a word, drinks, wipes his whiskers with the back of his paw. The silence settles like ash.]

RAT (quietly, reverently):
“Amen.”

[A breeze rolls in from nowhere. The bottle is half empty. Or half full. But nobody cares anymore. The stars blink in agreement.]

[CURTAIN FALLS. No applause. Just the sound of two old souls watching the world tilt gently away.]

[CURTAIN RISES — twilight on a ruined battlefield stage. Smoke drifts like forgotten prayers. Flags hang limp. A broken statue lies in two pieces downstage. RAT stands with a torn coat and a cracked voice. BOB leans on the barrel of a rusted cannon, eyes lost somewhere between history and hangover.]

RAT (quietly, as if repeating an old line he no longer believes):

"Unglücklich das Land, das keine Helden hat."

BOB (without looking up, bitter but not untrue):

"Nein. Unglücklich das Land, das Helden nötig hat."

[They don't argue. They don't need to. The silence between them says it all: the graves, the speeches, the statues no one dusts anymore.]

[A wind kicks up. Somewhere, a national anthem plays from a broken speaker, off-key and half-forgotten.]

RAT:

"We should've planted potatoes instead."

BOB:

"Potatoes don't lie to children."

[They both nod. The war is over. The damage isn't.]

[CURTAIN FALLS.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a quiet biergarten at closing time. Lanterns swing. The benches are empty but for BOB and RAT, seated beneath a crooked linden tree. Empty steins line the table like little declarations of poor diplomacy.]

BOB (half-slurring, half-thinking):
“Did I say *fuck Germany* before?”

RAT (without looking up):
“You did now.”

[Pause. A bratwurst vendor packs up in the distance with the resigned air of a man who’s heard this exact sentence every Thursday since 1945.]

RAT (sips quietly):
“But let’s not really get into that, eh?”

BOB:
“Why not?”

RAT:

“Because it starts with ‘Prussian militarism’ and ends with you trying to urinate on Kant’s grave.”

BOB:

“He started it.”

RAT:

“He really, really didn’t.”

[Long silence. A cuckoo clock somewhere desperately wants to chime but senses the tension.]

BOB:

“...Sausage is good though.”

RAT:

“Very.”

[CURTAIN FALLS as they order another round and agree — at least for now — that Bavarian beer and philosophical guilt are separate matters.]

[Spotlights blaze. A neon-swastika footlight sign flips to “*SPRINGTIME!*” Rat, clad in rhinestone SS regalia, high-kicks down a glitter runway fronting a massive set that looks like a Bavarian beer-hall crashed into Las Vegas.]

RAT (belting the famous opener, jazz-hands aflutter):

“Springtime for Hitler and Germany—
Deutschland is happy and gay!”

—The faux-Ziegfeld line of goose-stepping showgirls whirls past: storm-trooper helmets, silver lamé dirndls, and oversized pretzel props. Lederhosen dancers twirl parasols shaped like Panzer turrets. A papier-mâché Brandenburg Gate splits open to reveal a chorus of kick-lining Bavarian sausages spelling “HEIL!” in sequins.

BRIDGE (Rat croons, arms outstretched):

“Winter for Poland and France…”

—Saxophones wail a jazz-cabaret pastiche; a line of can-canning Wehrmacht officers flips their jackboots over their heads like Rockettes.

RAT (final flourish, arms thrown wide):
“Heil Hitler!”

[Cymbal crash. Music modulates. Drumroll.]

BOB bursts through gold curtains in full mock-Hitler drag—epaulettes, spats, and a pink sash—striking a Busby Berkeley pose.

BOB (crooning in schmaltzy baritone):

“Heil myself, heil to me...”

—He pirouettes, blows kisses to the balcony, then tap-dances across a giant rotating swastika dais that lights up like a casino wheel. Backup dancers flank him holding vanity mirrors so he can literally “heil himself” in every reflection.

[A spotlight jerks to the audience. Standing amid the scattered pretzel wrappers and rhinestone fallout is a man so stereotypically German it's legally actionable: square jaw, monocle, impeccably ironed grey wool suit, socks pulled to anatomical perfection. He adjusts his cravat and speaks in a thick, *Wernher von Braun meets Oktoberfest tour guide* accent.]

GERMAN MAN (with earnest gravity and comically misplaced decorum):
“*Vell... actually... ve’ve been a bit naughty.*”

[The audience freezes. The orchestra squeaks to a halt mid-rimshot. Somewhere backstage, a tuba inhales nervously.]

RAT (stage whisper to Bob):
“Did Germany just confess like it forgot to pay for parking?”

BOB (not missing a beat):
“Bit naughty? That’s what you say when you pocket a biscuit, not when you invent Blitzkrieg.”

GERMAN MAN (nodding solemnly):
 “Ja... ve had a *phase*. Like goths. Or disco. But... mit
 tanks.”

[Audience titters nervously. A spotlight flickers. Someone coughs in Polish.]

RAT (dry):
 “You know it’s a musical, right? You don’t *explain*
 genocide during jazz hands.”

GERMAN MAN (cheerfully):
 “Of course! But satire is *much* funnier ven we
 acknowledge ze war crimes, ya?”

[Bob and Rat exchange a long, silent look.]

BOB (shrugging):
“...Eh. At least he’s not singing.”

[Cue: the German man launches into an accordion-led polka titled *Oops, All Panzer!* as two girls in Dirndls drag him offstage with shepherd's crooks.]

[CURTAIN SLAMS DOWN before The Hague
sends a cease and desist.]

[CURTAIN RISES — a dim, empty soundstage. No
props. Just a spotlight and the two of them.]

RAT (sitting cross-legged center stage, tail curled
like a question mark):
“Dude, we’ve been pushing these open curtain–close
curtain sketches for a bit now. Ending it any time
soon?”

BOB (leaning against an imaginary fourth wall,
cigarette dangling, eyes smug):
“I see no reason why.”

RAT (nods):
“Fair to me. Just asking.”

[They sit in the silence of their own absurdity.
Somewhere, a single audience member coughs in
Russian. A bell tolls for no one in particular. A curtain

flutters in from stage left, then thinks better of it and leaves.]

BOB (quietly):
“You know they’ll keep reading as long as we keep saying things.”

RAT:
“Even if it’s nothing?”

BOB:
“Especially if it’s nothing. With emphasis.”

RAT (murmurs):
“... *Curtain falls.*”

BOB (without moving):
“No it doesn’t.”

[CURTAIN does not fall.]

[CURTAIN REMAINS OPEN — a barren stage. Two chairs. No props. No lights but one. A theatrical silence hangs like the last thread of meaning. RAT

sits slumped, arms dangling. BOB stands, looking at nothing in particular.]

RAT (softly, eyes distant):
“*Rien à faire.*”

BOB (after a pause, not agreeing, just accepting):
“*Je commence à le croire.*”

[A gust of Beckettian wind. The faint sound of a boot scraping somewhere far away. The kind of silence that doesn't end a scene — it traps it.]

[They remain there. As if they'd always been there. As if they'll never leave.]

[CURTAIN stays open. Of course it does.]

[CURTAIN ALREADY OPEN — the lights warm and glowing like the footlights of forgotten dreams. The STAGE HELPS rush in with the choreography of seasoned despair, dressing BOB and RAT with the finesse of old-school vaudeville hands: crisp dinner jackets, candy-striped vests, glossy shoes, boater hats

perched at cheeky angles, and twirly canes that practically wink.]

[BOB and RAT stand center stage, eyes locked like duellists of joy. The helps scuttle offstage.]

[Sudden spotlight—banjo chord strike—jazz piano fires up like it's owed rent.]

[BOB and RAT, as one, burst into synchronized high-kick glory, arms raised, hats twirling, teeth gleaming like showbiz weaponry.]

BOTH (with unrestrained glee):
♪ Hello, my baby!
Hello, my honey!
Hello, my ragtime gal! ♪

[They spin, tip hats to imaginary ladies, Rat twirls on a tiny gliding stage, Bob clicks his heels like a caffeine-fueled Fred Astaire.]

♪ Send me a kiss by wire.
Baby, my heart's on fire! ♪

[BOB fake-faints into Rat's arms. Rat catches him, dips him, then tosses him upright like a sack of debts.]

♪ *If you refuse me,*
Honey, you lose me,
Then you'll be left alone. ♪

[They both strut forward, canes tapping in tight syncopation.]

♪ *Oh baby, telephone...*
And tell me I'm— ♪

[Sudden hold, Rat spins his cane with a flourish, Bob lifts his boater hat high.]

♪ *Your oooooown!* ♪

[TRUMPET BLAST. FIREWORK SPARK. Rat strikes a Charlie Chaplin pose. Bob jazz hands into the orchestra pit.]

[AUDIENCE BURSTS INTO ROARING APPLAUSE. A chorus line of anthropomorphic phones kicks behind them. Somewhere, an old vaudevillian ghost weeps softly into a gin flask.]

[CURTAIN? Please. It doesn't dare close.]

[STAGE: Still basking in the glow of ragtime glory. Hats and canes now lie discarded like post-war treaties. STAGE HANDS glide in silently—one carrying a tiny ukulele on a red velvet cushion as if it were the Crown Jewels of Vaudeville. BOB accepts it solemnly. RAT dusts imaginary glitter from his lapels.]

[BOB strums a chord. The lights soften into a gentle tropical amber. He begins to sing in that sweet, syrupy croon you only get after three cocktails and a time machine to 1933.]

BOB (playing, serenely):
♪ *Honolulu baby, where'd you get those eyes?*
And that dark complexion that I idolize? ♪

[RAT begins to dance—awkward little kicks, limp-wristed spins, exaggerated hatless hat-tips. He wobbles like a slightly drunk marionette, full of Laurel and not a drop of grace. He pulls a lei from nowhere and throws it to an old woman in the second row, who catches it and instantly regrets her entire life.]

BOB (smiling mid-verse, still strumming):
“Now isn’t this nice?”

RAT (puffing, panting, doing a mock hula with zero hip control):
“It sure is. We’re just like two peas in a pot.”

BOB (stopping the ukulele, squinting):
“Not *pot*. *Poddd*. *Poddd*.”

RAT (nodding sagely):
“*Poddd*.”

[They both pause. Let the word *poddd* hang in the air like a particularly dense fog of nostalgia and nonsense.]

[The music picks up again. Rat grabs a pineapple, dances with it like it's Ginger Rogers. Bob strums as if the fate of Waikiki depended on it. Somewhere offstage, someone definitely spills a mai tai in tears.]

[No curtain. This number is eternal. Like love. Or debt.]

[STAGE: The glow shifts to a soft silver wash, evoking an old-timey moonlight that smells faintly of mothballs and bourbon. BOB bends down, retrieves his discarded boater hat, and cradles it tenderly—like it once held his dreams and now mostly holds stage dust. He presses it to his chest like it's going to prom.]

[He begins to sing, eyes somewhere between vaudeville sincerity and cosmic weariness. RAT, meanwhile, begins a completely unrelated

interpretive dance involving mime ropes, skipping, and a one-sided tango with an invisible iguana. He is in his own dimension entirely.]

BOB (soulfully, voice like a player piano with feelings):

♪ *Oh, shine on, shine on, harvest moon,
Up in the sky;
I ain't had no lovin'
Since April, January, June or July.* ♪

[RAT leaps onto an imaginary surfboard. Hula waves. Quick charleston. Attempts to moonwalk. Trips over his own tail and turns it into a bowtie. BOB ignores him entirely, as if Rat is a dream someone else is having.]

BOB (still holding the hat like it owes him money):

♪ *Snow time ain't no time to stay
Outdoors and spoon;
So shine on, shine on, harvest moon,
For me and my gal.* ♪

[Final note hangs. Bob gently spins the hat once in his hand, kisses it, and places it atop his head like a crown made of bygone tunes. Rat strikes a final pose, panting, arms wide, having accidentally created a contemporary dance piece about existential dread and accidental lactose consumption.]

[Silence. Then: a single clap from somewhere in the balcony. Then a second. Then the whole room—because nobody can resist the harvest moon. Not even the ushers.]

[CURTAIN? Don't be silly. The moon's still out.]

[STAGE — what's left of it after the theater's previous implosion. Smoke clears. Moonlight spills in. A single spotlight holds BOB and RAT in a quiet, tender pause. Their vaudeville jackets are gone. No costumes. Just two souls — one human, one rodent — on the brink of eternal Broadway glory.]

BOB (gently):

"I called Mama. She was so happy, she cried.

She wants you to have her wedding gown. It's white lace."

RAT (backing away):

"Bob, I can't get married in your mother's dress. She and I — we're not built the same way."

BOB (softly, hopeful):

"We can have it altered."

RAT (shakes head):

"Oh no you don't. Bob, I'm gonna level with you. We can't get married at all."

BOB (earnest):

"Why not?"

RAT (sighs):

"Well... in the first place, I'm not a natural blonde."

BOB (smiling):

"Doesn't matter."

RAT:

“I smoke. I smoke all the time.”

BOB:

“I don’t care.”

RAT:

“I have a terrible past. For three years I’ve been living in a sewer.”

BOB:

“I forgive you.”

RAT:

“I can never have children.”

BOB:

“We can adopt some.”

[Pause. RAT looks away, then turns back, his voice shaking.]

RAT:

“You don’t understand, Bob… I’m a rat.”

[A silence so profound the chandeliers tremble.]

BOB (without missing a beat):
“Well, nobody’s perfect.”

[ABSOLUTE ERUPTION. Applause detonates from every opera house, black box, fringe tent, and street corner from Broadway to the West End to a floating platform in the Adriatic. Theater majors weep openly. Entire drama departments declare bankruptcy from emotional overload. Roses — red, white, pink, metaphorical — rain down in biblical quantities. Stephen Sondheim’s ghost slow claps in awe.]

[STAGE FADES TO BLACK. Curtain? Obliterated. Art? Transcended. Love? Rodent-inclusive.]

In a city washed thin by rain and silence, a man walks through alleys and diners, bars and motel rooms—his presence marked by quiet footsteps, broken bodies, and a calm that unsettles more than any scream.

Bob is not a hero. He's not even a villain in the traditional sense. He is consequence given form. A man without haste, without apology, and without illusion. Violence follows him, not out of rage, but out of rhythm. Each act precise. Each death intimate.

As the world turns, oblivious and absurd, Bob drifts through it with a quiet mission known only to himself—and to the rat who has chosen to live in his coat.

Dark, unflinching, and laced with surreal humor, *Bob* is a descent into a mind unburdened by guilt, morality, or redemption. A story that walks the line between horror and farce, nihilism and clarity, brutality and performance.

There is no message. Just blood, silence, and a strange kind of truth.